# IN THE SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE FOR A FREE BYELORUSSIA

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON PROFESSOR RADOSLAV OSTROWSKI

BY

V. KALUSH

LONDON, 1964

IN THE SERVICE
OF THE PEOPLE
FOR A FREE
**BYELORUSSIA**


Byelorussia
Scale 1:3 000 000
LATVIA
Latviyskaya S.S.R.
LITHUANIA
Litowskaya S.S.R.
R.S.F.S.R.
R. S. F. S. R.
BALTIC SEA
Kaliningradskaya Oblast
Ostpreussen
EAST PRUSSIA
POLAND
U. S. S. R.
UKRAINE
KÖNIGSBERG
KAUNAS
WARSAW
POLATSK
VITSYEBSK
SMALENSK
MALADECHNA
MYENSK
MAHILEW
BARANAVICHY
BABRUISK
PINSK
MAZYR
BRANSK
(GRODNO) HORADNYA
BREST (BYERASTSYE)
HOMEL (GOMEL)
Orsha
Barysaw
Lida
Slutsk
Rahachow
Zhlobin
Luninyets
Kalinkavichy
Kobryn
Pruzhany
Lublin
Kholm
Kovel
Sarny
Ovruch
Lukow
Roslavl
Klintsy
Unyecha
Staradub
Novazybkaw
Trubchevsk
Rzhew
Vyazma
Yartsevo
Nelnya
Asipovichy
Navahradak
Lepel
Nevel
Augustow
Grayewo
Byelastok
Lapy
Byelsk
Index to boundaries:
Etnographical boundaries of Byelorussia.
Political boundaries of Byelaruskaya S.S.R. 1946.
Interstate boundaries.
Provincial boundaries.
Towns of province
Towns of district (rayon)
1950

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# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

The Byelorussian national liberation movement reared quite a few of the nation's most prominent sons who devoted their lives to the fight for the freedom and happiness of their country. One of these is the former President of the Byelorussian Central Council, Professor Radoslav Ostrowski, who, on the 25th of October of this year will be celebrating his seventy-seventh birthday, which is also his sixtieth anniversary as an active fighter in the ranks of the Byelorussian national liberation movement.

R. Ostrowski was born into a peasant family in our beautiful Slutsk countryside and from early childhood was closely acquainted with the lot of the Byelorussian peasant. From his school days onwards he therefore associated himself with the fight for the rights and ideals of the Byelorussian people.

At the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917 we see R. Ostrowski taking a most active part in the shaping of Byelorussian statehood; he becomes Commissar for the Slutsk district under the Temporary Russian Government; he is one of the Byelorussian delegates to the Moscow State Council; he attends as delegate the First All-Byelorussian Congress; he founds the first Byelorussian grammar school at Slutsk and works as its headmaster from the day it opens (4th September, 1917) until 20th June 1920 when, as an active opponent of Bolshevism, he is obliged to go further west in order to avoid the terrorism of the Bolshevik occupation.

In Western Byelorussia, which then fell under Polish occupation, R. Ostrowski directed for thirteen years the Byelorussian grammar school at Vilna, at the same time taking an active part in social and political work.

His energetic activities as chairman of the Byelorussian Co-operative Bank and vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Peasants and Workers Hramada made him a thorn in the flesh of the Polish administration, who arrested him, put him in prison, and finally removed him to a post in central Poland.

In the very first days of the German-Soviet war R. Ostrowski is seen returning from his exile to throw himself whole-heartedly once more into the work for his country. In July, 1941, we find him at Minsk entrusted with the setting up of the Byelorussian administration for that region, and later he performs the same task in the Bransk, Smolensk and Mogilev regions. On the 21st December, 1943, he is put at the head of the Byelorussian Central Council which was to mobilise and coordinate all the forces of the Byelorussian people for the defence of their country against the Bolshevik danger and for the fight for the national independence of Byelorussia.

Under the leadership of R. Ostrowski as President of the Byelorussian Central Council important constructive work was done in all fields with the aim of building up a national state. It was a sign of the trust placed in him that at the Second All-Byelorussian Congress R. Ostrowski was unanimously elected as the only rightful representative of the Byelorussian people and their country.

Wishing to commemorate the seventy-seventh birthday of this untiring and incorruptible fighter for the freedom and happiness of the Byelorussian people, the publishers of "Abyednanye" have decided to send into the world this small booklet which gives an outline of his life, work and struggles.

London, 1964. **A. Warawa**

## FAMILY BACKGROUND

Radoslav Ostrowski was born on the 25th of October, 1887, in the district of Slutsk, into a well-to-do peasant family.

Here I must categorically deny Bolshevik propaganda lies, which label R. Ostrowski a "rich landowner and former Tsarist officer."* None of R. Ostrowski's relations ever was a landowner in the proper sense of the word. His grandfather and father were landless peasants who all their life were merely tenant farmers. In 1904, R. Ostrowski's father leased a smallholding at Pavstin from Count Rosvadovski. In 1907 however, Rosvadovski sold part of his estate, including this holding, to one Shablovski, who wanted to parcel up the land and sell it again. The snag was that the tenancy contract ran for another 9 years. So Shablovski offered R. Ostrowski's father, Kasimir Ostrowski, 20 hectares of other land (five of arable land and fifteen of marshland) in compensation for breaking the contract.

It was probably from that time that the Bolsheviks regarded R. Ostrowski as a landowner. If so, the whole village of Pavstin consisted of such "landowners", where the official allocation of land by the state amounted to 52 hectares per peasant farmer, the soil of the district being very poor.

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*) History of the Byelorussian SSR, Vol. 2. by T. S. Gorbunov, N. V. Kamyenskaya, & I. S. Kravchenko. Published by the Academy of Science of BSSR, Minsk 1961, p. 445.

## SCHOOL YEARS

After leaving Staritsa primary school at the end of the spring term 1898, R. Ostrowski entered the first form of Slutsk Theological School in the autumn of the same year.

What it was like at these theological schools of the time is well described in Pamyalovsky's book "Bursa" (a boarding school). The pupils at these schools were called "bursaks", from "bursa" (hostel), in which the sons of priests attending the school had to live. Although the sons of non-priests lived out at students' lodgings, they were nonetheless subject to the same rules and regulations as the boarders.

All the pupils had to attend prayers at 7 o'clock in the morning. Lessons started at 8 a.m. and lasted till 1.15 p.m. Then there was the midday break, and at 4 p.m. the pupils had to be back in their classrooms for the homework period until 8.30 p.m., with a half hour break for supper.

The pupils, whether living at the hostel or in private lodgings, were forbidden to go into town or anywhere else without special permission, even on days when there were no classes.

The theological schools admitted only children of the Greek Orthodox denomination. Each school had its own church which was served by the pupils themselves. One of the 4th form boys used to be appointed as choirmaster, while others performed duties as acolytes. The boys chosen for these duties were usually those who had made good progress in

their studies. Among these was R. Ostrowski, who served as acolyte when he was in his 2nd and 3rd year at the school.

The headmaster of the school was always a priest with a higher theological education. During R. Ostrowski's time the headmaster of Slutsk Theological School was Father Mikhail Istochnikov, and the assistant headmaster Ivan P. Uspenski.

Apart from the theological school, Slutsk had an eight year grammar school (Gymnasium), at which the pupils enjoyed much greater freedom, and from which they could go on to University. The pupils of theological schools, however, could only go to theological seminaries, since up to 1906 theological scholars were barred from the universities.

The theological career did not appeal to R. Ostrowski. When he was in the 3rd form of the theological school he begged his father to let him go to the grammar school before it was too late. His father was somewhat reluctant, as grammar school fees were considerably higher. But R. Ostrowski had his way, and a friend of the family's, Josef Dyla, a student at the Dorpat Veterinary Institute, promised to coach him during the summer vacation for the entrance examination.

By January 1902 R. Ostrowski was a pupil in the 3rd form of Slutsk Grammar School and found himself in a completely different and more exhilarating atmosphere. R. Ostrowski was a very good scholar and always top of his form. He read a great deal and not only books available from the school shelves, but also books obtained through the clandestine library. This service was organised by older students and the "forbidden" books were stored at the doctor's home or at the house of the judge or some other citizen of repute in the town.

In R. Ostrowski's time this secret library was housed at the home of his classmate, M. Kastsetski, whose father was chairman of Slutsk District Council, and, from 1905, presided at the Parents' Committee of the school.

The 5th and 6th forms had their own librarians who formed the liaison with the main library; and R. Ostrowski was one of them. Through these channels the pupils were supplied with books from the clandestine library.

During the Christmas and summer holidays, university students used to give lectures to their younger colleagues on various subjects, chiefly of an historical and political nature. In R. Ostrowski's day the most important lecturers at these conspiratorial student gatherings were the St. Petersburg students Polikarp Sevruk, Vladimir Baranchik, Simon Getsov, N. Ochopovsky and others.

Here, by the way, I ought to mention the strong revolutionary atmosphere which pervaded Slutsk Grammar School. From this school came revolutionaries such as Karpovich, who killed Minister Bogolepov, and Adolf Neumann, who became known through the trial of the so-called "Kuakuol School of Bomb-throwers." One of the masters of the grammar school in the nineties was the famous Byelorussian writer Olgerd Obukhovich. It was therefore not surprising that there was special unrest at Slutsk Grammar School during the first Russian revolution in 1905. There had periodically been trouble at the school. In the 1902/3 school years, for instance, there was a strike by 8th form students as a result of a serious argument with the Russian language master. Strikes of this kind generally led to the expulsion of the "troublemakers." In 1905 a strike flared up through the whole school

and classes were closed for some time. On this occasion, however, there was no victimisation. At the beginning of the following school year the students organised political demonstrations within the school, coming out at break times with red flags and revolutionary songs. There was no chance here of shielding the "trouble-makers" and six of them (R. Ostrowski, Ivan Baranchik, Saul Feinberg, Nathan Getsov, S. Petrashkevich and Yokhelson) were asked to leave the school voluntarily, or else they would be expelled, thereby forfeiting their right to enter any other educational institution.

Out of school and at a loose end, R. Ostrowski submerged himself in political activities and got in touch with the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Socialist Party (Hramada). Through his journeys to Minsk and Vilna, in order to obtain suitable propaganda literature, he became acquainted with the members of the "Nasha Niva" (Our Cornfield) organisation, A. Vlasov, Anton Lutskevich, Lyavitski, Ignatovski, and others.

Living with his father, R. Ostrowski helped him on the farm, cutting grass, ploughing, threshing, and so on. At the same time he studied in the evenings for the external school-leaving certificate. Not far from his father's place at Ureche lived a school friend of his, Ivan Baranchik, who was also a member of the Hramada. The two of them, together with a worker from Slutsk, Mark Osvetsimski, undertook the distribution of political literature to individual contacts in various villages.

R. Ostrowski told me of a funny incident which occurred at that time. I quote: "It was late in the summer of 1906 when the Hramada was campaigning in the villages for higher pay for agricultural workers,

especially those employed seasonally by the landowners. You must remember that the wages these labourers then received were extremely low. For a 12-hour working day a reaper would get 50-60 kopeks; a woman, cutting corn with a sickle, 35-40 kopeks; potato diggers 15-20 kopeks, the last amount buying about 5 lbs of bread. The Hramada wanted the workers to go on strike and for this purpose had issued special leaflets. My friend, Ivan Baranchik, and I were out all night on our bicycles distributing these leaflets in the villages of Pavstin, Zahradye, Sorah and Ureche. When I went to bed in the morning, I was soon awakened again by the voice of a Pavstin villager, V. Zhuk, talking to my father. Zhuk was one of the few educated peasants and was considered a 'specialist' in most matters. He was telling my father that the village had been visited in the night by 'democrats' who had scattered leaflets threatening 'to set the village on fire.' If he could only catch those fellows he would break their necks! My father, of course, guessed what it was all about and said to me: 'Now you see of what use your activities are!' However, after a little time, Zhuk came again, this time with one of our leaflets in his hand. He exclaimed: 'Now I know what it all means. Those Democrats are a good lot. They are not talking about burning our villages, but about spreading the fire of revolution throughout the land!' That same day one of our contacts, Charkowski, came with the demand for more leaflets..."

This little story goes to illustrate in what conditions revolutionary work among the broad mass of our peasantry had to be carried out in those days. But the enthusiasm and energy of the members of the local Hramada succeeded eventually in making the peasants of their district socially conscious, and during the

revolution of 1917 Slutsk District proved to be the most enlightened, nationally and politically, among all the districts of the Minsk region.

## UNIVERSITY YEARS

In June 1908, a year later than his contemporaries at school, R. Ostrowski passed the final examinations of Slutsk Grammar School, and in the autumn of that year went to St. Petersburg University to read mathematics.




In those days, the students at Russian universities organised themselves, with official approval, in regional students' associations. School-leavers from Slutsk, for instance, had their own organisations at the universities of St. Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev. At St. Petersburg the Slutsk Association had the most members; they numbered over sixty. At their annual general meeting, the Association elected their chairman, treasurer and secretary, who acted as the official representatives

of the Association when dealing with the university authorities. At the first meeting, in 1908, R. Ostrowski was elected chairman of the Slutsk Students' Association (Zemlyachestvo), a function which he carried out during his entire period at the university, being re-elected every year, until 1911, when he was arrested.

Whenever matters arose which were the concern of all students, the chairmen of the various regional organisations assembled at a general meeting, the decisions of which were binding on every one of the regional associations. Such a meeting was held at the beginning of 1911, under the chairmanship of Comrade Abram (pseudonym of Krylenko, later Attorney General of the U.S.S.R.), at which it was decided to call a general strike of students in protest against a limitation of the rights of students' associations, which these had enjoyed by virtue of a law since 1906. In order to ensure the success of the strike by general participation, it was necessary to have recourse to some chemical means of persuasion (stink bombs), when students of the 'Union of Russian People' (Soyuz Russkavo Naroda) tried to ignore the strike call.

At that time R. Ostrowski happened to be working in the chemical laboratory of Prof. Chugayev, and it was natural therefore to entrust him with the fabrication of these bombs. However, this activity did not last long, as on the third day of the strike the police, under the command of Colonel Halle (later General, and commandant in the Polish police of the Brest-Litovsk region), stormed the university. R. Ostrowski was arrested and, with other students, was sent to the Derabin prison in St. Petersburg. On February 19th, 1911, he was sent to the town of Pskov, and from there was directed to live, under police surveillance, in the Pruzhana district, where his family was then

residing. Soon afterwards he received a document from the Security Department in St. Petersburg, which prohibited him from entering the provinces of St. Petersburg and Moscow, any part of Finland, and barred him from all university towns.

This put him into a difficult position. However, with the help of an acquaintance, R. Ostrowski soon found a job as surveyor and was thus able to maintain his wife and children. In these conditions he carried on until in 1913 he managed to obtain permission to go to St. Petersburg.

He was, however, not able to re-enter the university there, since by instructions of the Ministry of Education the Rector was forbidden to admit any student who had previously been sent down. An influential connection was needed in order to get accepted by any other university. In this respect R. Ostrowski was fortunate. The professor of astronomy, S. P. Glazenap, gave him a letter of recommendation to the Minister of Education, Kasso, who reluctantly allowed R. Ostrowski to go to Dorpat University. From there he graduated in 1913, and on October 1st that year took up an appointment as teacher of physics and mathematics at a girls' grammar school at Chenstokhova in Poland.

## EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

R. Ostrowski did not stay long at Chenstokhova, as World War I broke out on August 1st, 1914, and the town was very soon occupied by the Germans. The educational authorities in Warsaw were evacuated to Moscow and the teachers were assigned to other districts. At the beginning of the school year 1914/15,

R. Ostrowski found himself in Minsk, teaching at the Zubakin-Falkovich and Skavarodnikava grammar schools for girls and at the Jewish E. M. Khaikin college of science.

When a teachers' training college was opened at Minsk, R. Ostrowski was appointed mathematics master for the school year 1915/16. Meanwhile, the Germans were advancing ever deeper into Russia. Vilna had already fallen, and Minsk was threatened. At the end of August 1915 the training college was ordered to evacuate to a town in Russia proper, Yaroslavl. It was doubtful at first whether the work of the college could be carried on, as it was difficult to estimate how many students would go to Yaroslavl. However, in October R. Ostrowski was asked to report for duty. He continued to teach there until the February Revolution 1917.

As all reserve officers were called up for service in the Tsar's army, including many teachers at secondary schools, the shortage of teaching staff became severe. R. Ostrowski therefore had to teach not only at his own college but at various other schools and colleges in Yaroslavl. He himself did not serve in the army. He was classed as reserve and, as a teacher, his call-up was deferred. These facts again dispose of Bolshevik propaganda, which describes R. Ostrowski as an officer in the Tsar's army.

Easter fell early in 1917 and schools broke up on March 22nd. R. Ostrowski returned to Byelorussia and took up political activity.

He initiated the setting up of village committees throughout the Slutsk district. Delegates from these elected a rural council, which in turn sent representatives to Slutsk. The latter formed the

Slutsk district committee. The town itself elected its own representatives.

In May 1917 R. Ostrowski was elected District Commissar of Slutsk and became the representative for the Slutsk district of the Temporary Russian Government headed by A. F. Kerensky. Simultaneously he was appointed by his home county Tsaravtsi as delegate to the Council of Soldiers, Workers and Peasants.

The work of a District Commissar in those early days demanded unlimited energy. Apart from his administrative functions, he had to perform the duties of chairman of the District Court and of the Military Recruiting Commission.

The Revolution had swept away the whole government machine of Tsarist days and all administrative and legal functions became the responsibility of the District Commissar. At Slutsk his task was made even more difficult by the fact that the front was only 60 km. away, along the line of Sinyavka—Budi—Lakhavichi. General Danilov, of the Second Army, had his headquarters in the town.

Only a man of unbounded energy could cope with the amount of work to be done. The men in the villages had almost all been mobilised. So as not to draw the few remaining peasants away from their work in daytime, R. Ostrowski opened his offices at 4 a.m. In this way the peasants and their complaints and petitions could be attended to before 8 or 9 a.m. when other administrative work started. Very often R. Ostrowski had to go into the country himself in order to settle disputes, and there was no end to meetings and conferences on a variety of subjects. Quite frequently his working day ended after midnight.

It is remarkable that despite this tremendous amount of work R. Ostrowski found time for activities of a purely national and cultural character. At the beginning of June 1917, for instance, he called a meeting, which more than 500 peasants from all over the Slutsk district attended. At this meeting he proposed the opening of a Byelorussian grammar school in Slutsk and of two other secondary schools at Tsimkavichi and Grozov. His proposals were, of course, enthusiastically accepted; and on September 4, 1917, the first Byelorussian grammar school opened its doors, at which 412 peasant children were admitted into the first four forms.

In order to provide further education for youths who, because of the war or for other reasons, had had to interrupt their schooling, R. Ostrowski opened for them in 1918, apart from the grammar school, the upper forms (5th, 6th and 7th) of a modern secondary school.

During the first phase of the Revolution, civil authority was gradually transferred into the hands of elected officials. At Minsk, the functions of the provincial commissar were carried out by Mr. Samoilenko and his three assistants, I. I. Metlin, K. Demidovich-Demidetski and K. Petrusevich. In July 1917 Samoilenko called a meeting of representatives from all districts. Each delegation consisted of five members: the District Commissar, two delegates from the District Committee and two town delegates. The chairman of that meeting was the Minsk chief of police, Mikhailov-Frunze, who proposed R. Ostrowski as candidate for the post of Provincial Commissar. R. Ostrowski, however, refused to stand and suggested Samoilenko instead. The latter was then duly elected. R. Ostrowski agreed to become one of the seven members of the

Provincial Commissar's advisory body, and in this capacity he had to travel to Minsk every week.

In August 1917 a political conference was held in Moscow under the chairmanship of A. F. Kerensky and among the delegates from Byelorussia were R. Ostrowski, V. Ivanovski, Josef Dyla and Burbis.

## AFTER THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

After the October Revolution R. Ostrowski withdrew from political activity and occupied himself exclusively with the schools of which he was headmaster. He resisted all Bolshevik attempts at persuasion and refused to collaborate with them in any way.

For one Sunday in November 1917 the Bolsheviks had called a meeting of the peasants. Knowing that R. Ostrowski was held in high esteem by these peasants, they wanted to prevent his influence on them and decided to arrest him and lock him up in Slutsk prison. Next morning, to R. Ostrowski's great surprise, a man called Rosental, a delegate to the Soldier's Council, entered his cell and announced that he was released. Rosental, however, requested that R. Ostrowski should accompany him to the place where the meeting was to be held. R. Ostrowski was reluctant at first, but Rosental insisted that the peasants would not believe he was free unless they saw him. When R. Ostrowski arrived, the peasants gave him a great ovation and, ignoring all calls to order, thronged round him. In the end the organisers found themselves obliged to invite R. Ostrowski up to the platform before they could proceed with their programme.

In December 1917 R. Ostrowski attended the First All-Byelorussian Congress and was elected into its

Council. After the dispersion of the Congress by the Bolsheviks, R. Ostrowski returned to Slutsk which, a few weeks later, on February 26, 1918, was again occupied by the Germans, the Bolsheviks having withdrawn further east on the previous day.

The population of Slutsk could sleep in peace for a while, free from the fear of sudden arrests and the shooting of innocent people by the Bolshevik Cheka. At the same time, however, the town was cut off from the rest of the world, since all transport was in the hands of the German military authorities.

Meanwhile the Council (Rada) of the First All-Byelorussian Congress — enlarged by additional members for the city of Minsk, for various political parties and social organisations — formed itself into the Council of the Byelorussian National Republic (BNR) and set up a National Secretariat headed by Josef Varonka. On 25th March 1918 the Council published the newly drawn up constitutional charter.

The National Secretariat found itself unable, however, to go ahead with its plans, since the newly constituted government was not recognised by the Germans. Arguments and quarrels began to arise among the members of the Council of BNR which eventually led to the decision to form a more conservative secretariat, headed by the well known and wealthy landowner Roman Skirmunt, who regarded himself as a Byelorussian. The representatives of the Byelorussian Socialist Party (Hramada) were the strongest group in the BNR Council. They agreed to the formation of a new Secretariat on condition that one member of their Central Committee, namely R. Ostrowski, became a member of the Secretariat. Their demand was satisfied and R. Ostrowski was called to Minsk. The chairman of the

new Secretariat, R. Skirmunt, asked R. Ostrowski to take charge of the Department of Education. R. Ostrowski was prepared to accept the post provided that the German occupation authorities permitted educational activity on a national scale in Byelorussian territory.

In order to clarify this basic question R. Ostrowski suggested immediate consultations with the German commander of the occupying forces who was stationed near Minsk, at the Loshytsa estate, General von Falkenhaim. Skirmunt and Ostrowski obtained an interview with him and presented their case. The general told them that, although he understood and sympathised with their ideas, he could not give them any assistance in the matter because Berlin had so far not given recognition to the Byelorussian Government.

On the following day the Council of the BNR met and Skirmunt, on behalf of all his Cabinet, resigned. R. Ostrowski returned to Slutsk and continued his work for national and cultural causes. Among other things, he published a weekly in the Byelorussian language, "Rodny Krai" (Native Land). Thus time went by until the Germans began to withdraw their troops from Byelorussia. Every patch of territory they left was immediately occupied by Bolshevik hordes. By 3 December, 1918, the Germans had cleared out of all areas east of Slutsk and on December 5 abandoned the town itself.

When the Bolsheviks in their approach had reached the village of Visyeya, seven kilometers from Slutsk, news of their list of those to be shot spread in the town. One of the grammar school boys somehow got hold of such a list and took it to R. Ostrowski, whose name was at the top of the list.

That same evening R. Ostrowski called a meeting of the teachers at his schools and transferred his responsibilities as headmaster into the hands of his assistants. On the night of 4/5 December 1918 he left Slutsk to go further south. In spite of transport difficulties he eventually reached the town of Mariupol, where he joined General Denikin's army.

In view of the fact that Ostrowski never had any military training, the commander of the 5th infantry division, General Vinogradov, kept him as cypher clerk in his headquarters. As an additional duty he edited the bulletins destined for the soldiers at the front.

With Denikin's army R. Ostrowski moved right across the Ukraine, from Mariupol to Berdyansk, Bolshoi Takmak, Melitopol, Ekaterinoslav, Elisabetgrad, Kremenchug, Kiev, Odessa, Uman, Zhmerinka and Proskurov. On December 18, 1919, he found himself at Voitovtsi, 10 km. from Podvolochisk where Polish troops were stationed. With the last detachments of the Polish forces retreating from Kiev, R. Ostrowski moved through Lvov, Kovel and Brest and, on December 22, returned to Slutsk which was then occupied by the Polish army.

At Slutsk he resumed his educational work as headmaster of the grammar school which he had created. But this was not to be for long. At the end of June 1920 Moscow launched its offensive in the west and under severe pressure the Poles retreated. R. Ostrowski once again had to leave Slutsk. This time he took his family with him and moved to the town of Pruzhana.

The Bolsheviks marched on Warsaw but soon retreated again in panic, leaving Pruzhana once more in Polish hands. R. Ostrowski found it impossible to pursue his teaching career. The Poles would not allow

any Byelorussian schools* and Ostrowski refused to work at Polish schools.

He got in touch with the Slutsk insurgents and with the so-called Byelorussian government, led by Adamovich and Levitsky, which had been set up by General Bulak-Balakhovich.

In order to be nearer the front, R. Ostrowski in November 1920 accepted the job of organiser for the Polish-American Relief Committee in the Pinsk and Luninets districts. At Pinsk he met Adamovich and Levitsky who informed him about the situation at the front. The three of them then went together to Warsaw in an effort to get help for the Slutsk insurgents. They saw the then Polish Prime Minister, Vitos, who, however, could not give them any assistance because hostilities between Poland and Moscow had ceased.

## AMERICAN RELIEF COMMITTEE
(POLSKO-AMERYKAŃSKI KOMITET POMOCY DZIECIOM)

After his return from Warsaw, R. Ostrowski put his whole energy into the relief work for his fellow countrymen, especially the children. The district of Pinsk had suffered severely in World War I and the population had been evacuated deep into Russia. After the war the refugees gradually returned, but few of them found their homes still standing. Formerly cultivated land lay neglected and there was no livestock. The people were starving and their only salvation was the help they received from the American Relief Committee. Within a very short time, Ostrowski organised a network of kitchens all over the Pinsk

*) The Re-Birth of Poland by W. K. Korostowetz, published by Geoffrey Bles, London 1928, p. 90.

district from which the children were supplied with valuable, high-calorie food. The activities of the local relief organisations in the whole of Poland were supervised by American inspectors of the Relief Committee. The Pinsk area was under the supervision of a Mr. Thompson from Boston. He inspected all the feeding centres, including those in the smallest and most out-of-the-way places, and he had only the highest praise for Ostrowski's organising ability and the conscientiousness he brought to his work. When Thompson returned to Warsaw, he suggested to his superior, Mr. M. Pate, to appoint R. Ostrowski inspector for the whole eastern region, which embraced the five provinces of Polesia, Lutsk, Novogrodok, Bialystok and Vilna, an area larger than all Western Byelorussia.

This position Ostrowski held in fact until the end of 1922 when the American Relief Committee finally wound up its operations.

In November 1922, the town council of Brest elected R. Ostrowski as councillor. This, however, was to be only a short interlude, as in December of the same year, two Byelorussian members of the Polish parliament, the Rev. Adam Stankevich and Simon Rak-Mikhailovski, appealed to him to save the Byelorussian grammar school in Vilna which the Poles intended to close for lack of a qualified headmaster. Although from the financial point of view, this was not an attractive proposition — the school would only pay him half of what he earned at Brest — R. Ostrowski agreed and on 7th January 1923 took over as headmaster of Vilna grammar school. In this position he continued for 13 years until September 1936, when the Provincial Governor, Bocianski, demanded from the Ministry of Education the removal of R. Ostrowski

from Vilna on the grounds that he was a politically dangerous person.

## VILNA

The Vilna period was for Ostrowski a time of most intensive work. Besides his duties as headmaster of the grammar school, he was chairman of the Byelorussian School Society which in 1926 had over 12,000 members. He was also chairman of the Byelorussian Relief Organisation and director of the Byelorussian Co-operative Bank.

His activities in the cultural and social fields led automatically to his involvement in politics, since the Poles regarded such activities as directed against the safety of the Polish state. This was, indeed, the case; but it was an attitude provoked by the Poles themselves through their policy of discrimination against the Byelorussian people who were, whether they liked it or not, forced to defend themselves and their interests. The forces in this struggle were, of course, very unequal. On the Polish side there was the well-organised state machine, which very often used methods of terrorisation. The Polish administration of Western Byelorussia constantly violated the constitutional laws under which Byelorussians and other national minorities in Poland were to enjoy the same rights as the Poles themselves. The Byelorussians were not allowed to have their own elementary schools, and all those that had existed under the German occupation (during World War I there were about 600) were closed. In order to prevent their children from losing their national identity, the Byelorussian School Society was compelled to open and maintain clandes-

tine schools. To camouflage these schools effectively was a very difficult task in a police state such as Poland was at the time. Whenever the police discovered one of them, the teachers were put in prison and the parents, whose children attended the school, were fined. Numerous protests by Byelorussian M.P.s* produced no results. In consequence, a number of Byelorussian M.P.s led by Prof. B. Tarashkevich, went into sharp opposition to the Polish government and formed an M.P.s' club which they called "Byelorussian Hramada of Peasants and Workers." This club grew into a powerful political party, which, by 1926, had over 100,000 registered members. R. Ostrowski, too, became a member of Hramada and although he agreed with its aims, he took no active part in its work, as



*R. Ostrowski, Vilna, 1925.*

*) Poland and Her National Minorities, 1919-39. by Stephan Horak, A.M.L.S., Ph.D., Vantage Press, New York 1961, p.p. 170-180.

he was more than fully occupied with his other duties.

The growth of Hramada frightened the Polish authorities and in order to compromise its activities, they infiltrated their agents into the party.

On January 14th, 1927, wholesale arrests were made all over Western Byelorussia of members of Hramada, including M.P.s, and other cultural and social activists. Among those arrested was R. Ostrowski. The accusation against him was that, as a director of the Byelorussian Co-operative Bank, he had received funds from Bolshevik sources to finance subversive activities of the Hramada. This was, of course, wholly untrue. But it was hoped by this libel to defame a man for whom wide circles of the population had always had the highest regard.

As the Byelorussian Hramada was being dissolved, the Poles arrested about 3,000 of its former members. The majority of these were later released for lack of evidence, the rest were tried in different places and at different times. The most important of these trials was the trial in Vilna of 56 leading personalities of Hramada, which lasted from February 22nd to May 22nd, 1928.* Nineteen of the accused were acquitted, among them R. Ostrowski. The former M.P.s, B. Tarashkevich, Simon Rak-Mikhailovski, Peter Metla and Paul Voloshin, were given severe sentences of 12 years imprisonment each. The secretary of the central committee of Hramada, M. Bursevich, and a lawyer, F. Okinchits, were sent to prison for 8 years.

In the course of the trial about 1,000 witnesses were heard whose statements left little doubt that the charges against the accused were unfounded. The

*) Poland The Struggle for Power, 1772-1939, by Henryk Frankel, published by Lindsey Drummond Ltd., London 1946, p.p. 155-56.

severe sentences shocked not only Byelorussians but even a great number of Polish politicians. In view of this, R. Ostrowski initiated proceedings for a fresh trial, pointing out to Polish politicians that the persecution of Hramada could only do harm. In this campaign he had on his side not only Polish M.P.s and senators such as B. Krizhanovski, V. Abramovich, Vendzagolski and others, but also the Governor of Vilna, Bechkovich, the Vice-Governor, S. Kirtiklis, and the editor of the "Vilna Courier", K. Okulich, who were all convinced that the suppression of a legal organisation such as Hramada only strengthened the subversive activities of the underground Communist Party of Western Byelorussia.

R. Ostrowski's efforts in this direction finally produced results but, alas, not in the desired form. Instead of agreeing to a re-trial, at which it was hoped the defendants would be acquitted, the Polish administration in an entirely unconstitutional manner released the prisoners without trial or amnesty and without restoring to them their civil rights of which they had previously been deprived.

This situation was, of course, immediately exploited by Moscow. By various promises the released Hramada members were lured into the U.S.S.R., where, after some time, — what irony of fate! — they were all liquidated on the Solovky island, convicted as Polish spies.* At the same time the Bolsheviks started an extensive campaign against R. Ostrowski, accusing him of being a Polonophile and a traitor to the Byelorussian people. In this vein they have continued ever since, adding to their charges that of collaboration with

*) Union Calendar No. 929, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, Communist Takeover and Occupation of Byelorussia, Washington 1955, p. 14.

the Germans during World War II. But more of this later.

After the departure of the Hramada members to the USSR, R. Ostrowski had little to do with active politics, but directed all his energy to social and cultural matters. He continued at the head of the Byelorussian School Society and as headmaster of the Vilna Byelorussian Grammar School. (Between 1930 and 1932 he was also headmaster of the "Francis Bogushevich" Byelorussian Teachers' Training College which was maintained by the Polish state.) He made every effort to persuade the Poles to open Byelorussian state primary schools, and in order to collect the necessary signatures for a petition from the parents who wished to send their children to Byelorussian schools, R. Ostrowski toured the country during one summer vacation. He had talked this action over with the head of the educational authorities of the Vilna region, K. Shelongovski, who was aware of the necessity of giving at least partial satisfaction to the rightful demands of the Byelorussian population.

At that time changes were taking place in the regional administration. A new governor for the Vilna region was appointed, Col. Bocianski, an ardent Polish chauvinist and enemy of everything Byelorussian. Bocianski did not approve of the policy of Shelongovski's educational department and soon did everything possible to have him removed from Vilna.

In the summer of 1936, K. Shelongovski was transferred to Warsaw and, at the same time, Bocianski rid himself of R. Ostrowski who, on 31st August 1936, was appointed to the Polish State Grammar School "Kopernik" at Lodz as teacher of mathematics and physics.

## LODŹ

Here R. Ostrowski had a relatively quiet time. There was no scope for any social work among Byelorussians and he gave all his time to his work at the school. To start with, he had a certain amount of difficulty with the language, because up to then he had never taught in Polish. However, he soon overcame this obstacle and fully mastered the Polish language. The governors of the school were very satisfied with Ostrowski's work and intervened on his behalf with the Ministry of Education when he requested that his previous years of teaching at Slutsk, Minsk and Chenstokhova should be taken into account in the assessment of his length of service. This was done and he then had sufficient years of service to qualify, according to Polish regulations, for promotion which carried a higher salary and the title of Professor.

On 4th September 1939 Lodz was occupied by German troops under General von Brauchitsch. The day before, all Polish police and state officials, including the headmasters of schools and some of their staff, had left the town in panic in the direction of Warsaw. General von Brauchitsch gave orders for all public institutions to resume normal work without delay. Due to the absence of the headmaster of Ostrowski's school, Bramirski, who had fled with his family to Warsaw, Ostrowski, together with his German colleague Kurzmann, had to run the "Kopernik" school and later also the "Narutovich" school whose headmaster had also gone. At Christmas, however, all Polish schools were closed.



*Antonina Ostrowski with her pupils of the "Francis Bohushevich" Byelorussian Teachers' Training College at Vilna (1932).*

On 5 December 1939 R. Ostrowski received news from a former pupil of his in Lithuania who told him that his wife, Antonina Ostrowski, who had taught at the Byelorussian school in Vilna, and his son, Victor, had been arrested by the Bolsheviks on the 1st October 1939. Ostrowski was greatly alarmed by this and attempted to make his way from Lodz to Lithuania to be with his daughter who was working there as a doctor. However, he was unable to obtain a visa from the Lithuanian Consulate in Berlin and a short time afterwards Lithuania met the same fate as Byelorussia and was overrun for the second time by the Bolshevik army.

At this time the various "national committees" began to organise themselves at Lodz. By January 1940 the Ukrainian Committee, under Colonel Nahnybida, and the Russian Committee were already in existence. Not knowing at first whether there were any Byelorussians in Lodz, Ostrowski asked the Ukrainians to allow possible Byelorussian applicants to register at their offices, to which the Ukrainians willingly agreed.

The news of the formation of a Byelorussian National Committee spread quickly all over the town and district of Lodz. It turned out that at the Lodz textile factories of Scheibler and Grohman, Poznanski, and others, many employees were Byelorussians and very soon over 900 of them registered with the national committee.

It was not easy to organise the committee. The majority of the Byelorussians who had been living in Lodz for decades were Roman Catholics from the Švenčionys area who had quickly become Polonised and had almost forgotten their native language. The younger generation hardly spoke Byelorussian at all. There was plenty for the committee to do. Apart from

issuing certificates to those who had been registered as Byelorussians, one of its main tasks was to obtain the release of Byelorussians, who had been arrested as Poles, from German concentration camps at Dachau and other places. The gratitude of the released victims, who had already given up all hope of escaping from the Gestapo hell, was a wonderful reward for this work.

In the summer of 1940 R. Ostrowski made contact with the Byelorussian Committees at Warsaw, Poznan and Berlin. The Warsaw Committee was run by Dr. M. Shchors and at the head of the Byelorussian representation in Berlin was the Dipl. eng. Mr. Shkutka. When a former pupil of his, Dr. V. Tumash, came to Lodz Ostrowski handed over to him the chairmanship of the National Committee while he himself remained responsible for the Lodz branch of the Byelorussian representation in Berlin.

Under Dr. Tumash the activities of the Byelorussian Committee ranged over a wider field. There were Sunday lectures on Byelorussian history and special courses for young people covering all aspects of Byelorussian life. So the time passed until on 22nd June 1941 the Germans, without any declaration of war, attacked their former ally, the USSR. With the help of Dr. Shchors, R. Ostrowski managed to depart for Byelorussia on the 2nd of July.

## R. OSTROWSKI BACK IN BYELORUSSIA

From Warsaw Ostrowski made his way to Pinsk where he arrived on 5th July, 1941. It was impossible to go any further because Bolshevik bands were still near the town.

He stayed a few days in Pinsk and got in touch with his acquaintances. Then he made his way back to Brest from where he managed to get himself on a military train to Minsk. The administration of the town was more or less organized and the Mayor of Minsk was Dr. Tumash, who took Ostrowski to the Field Commandant's office, to see the officer in charge of Zivilverwaltung named Kraaz. The latter's interpreter was Major A. Benckendorff, a former Colonel in the Tsarist Guards and a German Balt by origin. Oberkriegsverwaltungsrat Kraaz suggested that R. Ostrowski should set up an administrative structure for the various districts of the Minsk region, a task which Ostrowski agreed to take on.

From the Byelorussian National Committee in Warsaw came 40 members who were prepared to work in the native government. Although not all of them were particularly suited to administrative jobs, Ostrowski decided to use them temporarily. In several conferences he acquainted them with their tasks and then set them to work in pairs in the various districts, one heading the civil administration and the other the police.

Every district chief of civil administration was instructed to appoint within a week a temporary chief for each of the rural council areas (Sel Soviets) of his district and with all of them come to Minsk. Transport for this purpose was provided by the German occupation authorities. R. Ostrowski was thus able, within less than a fortnight, to have a full meeting with all the Sel Soviets (now called Volostsi) of the Minsk region.

Parallel to this, Ostrowski organized the regional administration, partly retaining the Soviet system. In this he was helped considerably by Simon Kandi-

bovich, who had worked under the Soviet administration and whom Ostrowski knew from childhood when they were together at Staritsa primary school.

Kraaz was very pleased with the efficient administration of Minsk region and suggested to Ostrowski that he should go with him further east to Bransk, where the Field Commandant's office was moving. Ostrowski promised to consider the proposal.

## GENERAL COMMISSARIAT FOR BYELORUSSIA

At the beginning of September 1941 the territory of the Minsk region was taken over by the German civil administration* under the "General Commissar for Byelorussia" and the military occupation forces were to be transferred further east to Bransk. R. Ostrowski was instructed to resign his office into the hands of the General Commissar, Kube. The latter, however, had obviously been informed by Kraaz about Ostrowski and his work, for he asked Ostrowski to remain in office but made the condition that German heads of departments should contact their opposite numbers in the Byelorussian administration only through him, Ostrowski. Ostrowski thanked him for his offer, but objected to the condition attached to it. He argued that it would be more efficient if German and Byelorussian officials were to have direct contact, as the various specialists would understand each other better. Kube eventually agreed. At the same time he asked Ostrowski to work for him as head of some sort of "Nebenbüro." This, in fact, consisted of only one department which was to supply statistics and for

*) Communist Takeover and Occupation of Byelorussia, Union Calendar No. 929, Washington 1955, p.p. 20-29.

which there was no German official available. As a counter proposal Ostrowski asked Kube to let him open a training college for teachers because the shortage of teaching staff had become very severe. Kube told him that he, too, was a teacher and had been running a teachers' seminary in the past. He promised to grant Ostrowski's request. In this, however, he proved to have been insincere, because when the time came Ostrowski was unable to obtain from the German authorities the allocation of premises for the proposed college.

The reasons for the German attitude in these matters are not far to seek. Like the Russian imperialists of Tsarist days, the German imperialists were opposed to any expressions of Byelorussian separatism.

At the end of October 1941 the Germans suddenly wanted to confiscate Ostrowski's wireless set. Ostrowski was at the time living with V. Shavel, a former pupil of his from Vilna who was regional chief of police and who in the course of his duty had to co-operate with the German counter intelligence (Abwehr). Shavel's superior, Major Kribitz, had previously issued a permit for the radio and it could not, in fact, be taken away. The incident so annoyed Ostrowski, however, that he immediately wrote to Kube telling him that in such a strained atmosphere co-operation was impossible. Simultaneously Ostrowski notified Kraaz that he was prepared to follow him to Bransk. The dividing line between the civil administration (General Commissariat) and the military government ran through Borisov and there Kube's authority ended.

## THE EXTERMINATION OF JEWS IN BYELORUSSIA AND GENERAL COMMISSAR KUBE

In accordance with the general pattern of the German occupation of European territories the destruction of the Jews was also carried on in Byelorussia. In many respects, however, the action here took on a character different from that in other countries. The native population of Byelorussia not only had no part in the persecution of the Jews, but dared to express its indignation and horror in the face of the German occupier. Moreover, there is ample proof not only of passive sympathy but of the great courage with which Byelorussians often risked their lives in order to help the Jews. Here are a few examples which will illustrate that period.

In August 1941 the Germans began to organise the ghetto at Minsk. This, of course, shocked and frightened anyone who, in one way or another, had any connection with Jews. Professor Markov, who was working at a Minsk hospital, came to Ostrowski and asked him to help save his wife who was Jewish. R. Ostrowski personally took her to Zaslavl and arranged for her to be employed as a translator at the Zaslavl district council. In this way Professor Markov's wife was saved. (She and her husband later joined the Communist partisans.) The penalty for a "crime" such as Ostrowski's was only too well known at the time. Hundreds of Byelorussian peasants have been shot by the Germans merely for asking for pity on the Jew's behalf.

In the village of Ustasha the population went in religious procession with icons and crucifixes to plead with the Germans to have mercy on the Jews.

The last fact mentioned above is quoted by a well known enemy of Byelorussian nationalism, Mr. Vakar, in his book "Byelorussia", published in the U.S.A. in 1956.

Although documents about similar occurrences were in existence after the war, they were mainly in the possession of Jews, who allowed their material to be used by writers not always anxious to give an objective account of events, and did not hesitate to "lose" documents which did not fit their theories.

Below I quote a few paragraphs from the book "The Case Against Adolf Eichmann", edited by Henry A. Zeiger and with a foreword by Harry Golden, published in 1960 by The New American Library. These quotations relate to the time when Kube was General Commissar for Byelorussia.

"...Upon my arrival there (Borisov) on Friday I was informed by the head of the Russian security police there, Ehof, who had been installed in this post some time ago by the SD, that on the night from Sunday to Monday all Jews in Borisov were to be shot..." (p. 69).

"...They (the Russian Security Police) were provided with the well-known red and white armband and armed with rifles or automatic pistols..." (p. 70).

"...Shortly before my departure for the front I met two German soldiers, a private first class and a corporal, who, for curiosity's sake had witnessed these executions... They fully confirmed the information sought by me... The population of Borisov is of the opinion that the Russian Security men would enrich themselves with the valuables left behind by the Jews... These security men, moreover, are said to consist largely of old Communists, but nobody dares to report them..." (p. 72).

The above are extracts from the "Report on the execution of Jews in Borisov" made by Soennecken, master sergeant and interpreter for the Russian language with Intelligence Command B, to his chief, General Lahousen, dated 24 October, 1941.

Here follows a remark by the compiler of the book, Zeiger. He says that with the continuation of the campaign this sergeant's complaint was repeated often by officers of the army. General Kube, says Zeiger, complained of the disorder caused by the appearance of SS Einsatzgruppen. (v. p. 73).

"...Peace and order cannot be maintained in White Ruthenia with methods of that sort. To bury seriously wounded people alive who worked their way out of their graves again, is such a base and filthy act that this incident as such should be reported to the Fuehrer and Reichs Marshal. The civil administration of White Ruthenia makes very strenuous efforts to win the population over to Germany in accordance with the instructions of the Fuehrer. These efforts cannot be brought in harmony with the methods described herein..." (p. 74 — Extract from a letter by Kube to the Reichs Commissar for the Eastern Territories, Gauleiter Heinrich Lohse, at Riga, dated 1 November, 1941).

"...Regardless of the fact that the Jewish people, among whom were also tradesmen, were mistreated in a terribly barbarous way in the face of the White Ruthenian people, the White Ruthenians themselves were also worked over with rubber clubs and rifle butts... In several instances I literally had to expel with drawn pistol the German police officials as well as the Lithuanian partisans..." (p. 75).

"...I hope that I shall be able to restore order as soon as possible... Only, I beg you to grant me one

request: 'In the future keep this police battalion away from me by all means'..." (p. 77 — Extract from letter of 30 October 1941 by the Commissar for Slutsk, Karl, to Kube, who enclosed it in his report to Lohse).

It is evident that Kube complained more than once about the situation, says Zeiger, because two years later, in 1943, Kube's superior sent another report by Kube to Berlin (v. p. 77).

The above are a few interesting extracts from documents which throw light on the situation in Byelorussia and which, but for the Eichmann case, would never have been published.

Analysing this interesting material one arrives at the following conclusions:

a) All the criminals employed by the Germans in Byelorussia were people of Ehof's type, and the Germans' henchmen were usually Communists and Moscovites whose intention was to compromise the Byelorussian nationalist movement by exhibiting on their sleeves the Byelorussian colours when engaged on their murderous missions.

b) The Byelorussian population refused to have any part in the crimes against Jews, and the Germans were, therefore, obliged to bring in the scum of Lithuanian and German police for this purpose.

c) The Germans were concerned about the opinion of the Byelorussian people, whom they knew to be shocked by the acts of inhumanity committed under their eyes.

d) Some Germans, and evidently Kube himself, were of the opinion that even Hitler would not approve of these barbarities.

e) There was clearly visible disagreement between the policies of the German army of occupation and the activities of the special party units.

If, then, the General Commissar for Byelorussia and other high officials could not stop the atrocities perpetrated by their own countrymen and hired henchmen, how can the slightest blame be put on Byelorussian nationalist leaders and on R. Ostrowski personally?

(Here is a little note for anti-Byelorussian Russophiles and others: Of the national minorities that entered into the "nationalistic" Council (Rada) in 1918, there were 7 Jews, 4 Poles, 2 Russians and 1 Lithuanian.* In one of the recent Governments of the Byelorussian SSR under Soviet Russian "democratic" protection we have somewhat of a contrast. There are only 7 Byelorussians, one Jew, one Georgian and the remaining 26 are Moscovite Russians.)**

A comment on point a) may not be amiss here. From the Soviet propaganda booklet "How They Served The People" we learn on p. 34 that "David Ehof, a russianised German from the Volga region and one of the active participants of the bloody events at Borisov in 1941, now lives in a Free Settlement in the Soviet Union..." One can conclude from this that it is necessary to be a Russian or russianised German to be able to commit such beastly crimes as Ehof committed... For people like these the "fatherland" shows forgiveness, and for the greatest crimes like Ehof's the only punishment is "free settlement."

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*) Communist Takeover and Occupation of Byelorussia. Union Calendar No. 929, Washington 1955, p. 9.

**) Soviet Russian Nationalism by F. C. Barghoorn, New York 1956, p. 139. See also: Anti-Semitism in Byelorussia and its origin, by W. Ostrowski, London 1960, p.p. 46-56.

## BRANSK

When Ostrowski left Minsk for Bransk with the Field Commandant's office he knew that his work there would not be easy, but he was glad to get away from the German party men whom he disliked so much.

The general situation in Bransk was much more difficult than in Minsk. The river Desna had for several months been the front line and heavy battles had been fought there, for Bransk was an important strategic point and an industrial town. When Ostrowski arrived there the town administration was in a more or less organised state. The Germans had installed a Volga German from Klintsi, a drunkard, as mayor. For the district, however, no administration had yet been set up. Ostrowski was faced with a difficult problem. He had never been to Bransk before and had no acquaintances there. The town council lent him one of their officials for a few weeks to help him organise an office for the district administration. But the main problem was to find local people who were familiar with administrative work. Eventually Ostrowski found three former officials, but they all happened to be members of the Communist Party. It was impossible for Ostrowski to judge whether they came forward because they had overcome their previous fear or whether they were planted by the NKVD. After talking with them for several hours, Ostrowski decided to take the risk and put them to work, but he warned them that their end would be a sad one if they worked for Stalin rather than for the people, as the security forces (SD) were sure to

find out sooner or later. Of course he had to talk this matter over previously with Kraaz, who was at first somewhat embarrassed but, after listening to Ostrowski's arguments for the necessity of having these specialists who knew the people and the district, finally agreed on condition that the case was referred to the SD. The next day Ostrowski saw the head of the SD, who told him that he had already been informed by Kraaz and that in his personal opinion it was a risky business. In the end he consented to the appointments, provided Ostrowski took full responsibility. One of these Communists, Shamayev, was appointed head of the supply department; the second, Morozov, head of the finance department, and the third, Abramovich, chief accountant.

To enable him to staff other departments, Ostrowski received permission to recruit people from a prisoner of war camp. There he chose seventeen men, Soviet agronomists, engineers, doctors and teachers. Some of these completed the administrative council, others took up posts in the district.

The administration formed in such an unusual way worked with extraordinary efficiency and Ostrowski had no trouble with his chosen staff, for whom he tried to obtain everything they needed.

When at one time the SD arbitrarily arrested the above mentioned Shamayev, Ostrowski was able to secure his immediate release. Within three months the Bransk district administration was fully organised and the population was grateful to have some defence against German inroads.

Bransk was to be another short episode in Ostrowski's career, because at the end of April 1942 Kraaz was transferred to Smolensk and Ostrowski went with him

after handing over to his second in command, the agronomist Petrov, one of the former prisoners of war.

## SMOLENSK

One pleasant feature of Ostrowski's work at Smolensk was that in the country he came across Byelorussians who knew him personally or had heard about him from others. In the town itself, however, the attitude towards him, as a Byelorussian, was very hostile. The mayor was Menshagin, a former Soviet lawyer and a fierce Russian chauvinist. His second in command was at first Professor Basilevsky and later Ganduk, who had been sent to Smolensk by the Czech headquarters of the "Russian Solidarists." The Germans, in the meantime, had found for themselves General Vlasov, on whom they set great hopes. All offices in the town were staffed with Russians who, more often than not, were hostile towards Byelorussians. As is known, the Smolensk region was not incorporated in the Byelorussian S.S.R., although it is ethnographically Byelorussian territory, and Moscovite elements were everywhere. Early on Ostrowski tried to open Byelorussian schools and for this purpose ordered Byelorussian text books from Minsk. The Moscovites, however, made such a fuss that the Field Commandant, General Pool, asked Ostrowski to abandon the idea, though he had to agree that Smolensk was Byelorussian territory. "We are soldiers", said General Pool, "and cannot change state borders; this is a case for post-war politicians." Ostrowski had to give in. The various zones of military government, however, did not always correspond to the Soviet administrative divisions, and it so happened that two

districts in the B.S.S.R., i.e. Lozno in the Vitebsk region and Mstislavl in the Mogilev region, were added during the winter of 1942 to the Smolensk military government area. Kraaz asked Ostrowski to go to these districts and take over their administration. Ostrowski agreed, but pointed out that separate head offices would be required in Smolensk as he could not be expected to correspond with these districts in Russian. Kraaz did not like this and tried to persuade Ostrowski to withdraw his objection, but the latter remained adamant. Then Kraaz took Ostrowski to see General Pool who, listening first to Kraaz and then to Ostrowski, had to agree with Ostrowski's point of view, since it was impossible to change a once established principle.

Kraaz, who had been working with Ostrowski for two years and had got used to his system of administration and had full confidence in him, disapproved of the methods of Menshagin, mayor of Smolensk. He told Ostrowski so and asked him whether he could not suggest a suitable candidate to take Menshagin's place. Ostrowski immediately wrote to Dr. Stanislav Stankevich, who was then head of the Borisov district, and asked him to come to Smolensk. Stankevich soon arrived and after considering the matter from all angles agreed to take on the post. But for some reason he changed his mind the next day and went back to Borisov.

By the summer of 1943 the position at the front had considerably worsened for the Germans, and they began to regroup their forces. In the course of these changes the Smolensk Field Commandant, General Pool, was transferred to Baranovichi, and Kraaz was sent to Mogilev. When he received his orders Kraaz asked Ostrowski to go with him to Mogilev and in

order to persuade him played on his nationalist sentiments by pointing out that Mogilev had a Russian mayor, Dr. Filatov, who was bent on russifying the town. Ostrowski agreed to the move, provided that Kraaz would appoint as new mayor of Mogilev one of the Smolensk officials, i.e. the head of the Kaspla district, Ivan Naronski. Kraaz consented and, with Naronski, went off to Mogilev. Ostrowski, meanwhile, handed over his duties at Smolensk to his assistant, Nicholas Nikitin, a very pleasant man who had formerly been professor at the Vitebsk Veterinary Institute and, incidentally, had served a ten-year sentence under the Bolsheviks in Kazakhstan.

## MOGILEV

Ostrowski arrived in Mogilev at the beginning of July 1943 and applied himself at once to setting up an administration for the rural areas. The town itself was already organized.

He gave his particular attention to education and at the end of August called a meeting of all elementary school teachers at which he advised them on the most efficient running of the schools during the 1943/44 school year. For Mogilev itself he planned a Byelorussian Grammar School. At the same time he helped Dr. Stepanov to open a Medical Institute, attached to the Mogilev Hospital, which began its courses as early as September 1943. About this time Kraaz was drafted to the front and at the beginning of October Ostrowski fell ill and afterwards went to convalesce at Baranovichi where his daughter was working as a doctor.

## AGAIN AT MINSK

On 20 December 1943 Ostrowski received a telegram from Yuri Sobolevski, chairman of the Byelorussian Relief Organisation (Samapomač) in Minsk, asking him to come at once to Minsk by the night train. The next day, December 21, under the chairmanship of Sobolevski, the Byelorussian nationalist leaders met to discuss the proposal made by General Commissar v. Gottberg concerning the creation of a supreme council of Byelorussian representatives to take the place of the advisory body which had been set up under General Commissar Kube. All the speakers were agreed that v. Gottberg's suggestion should be followed since failure to do so might have unpleasant consequences for the Byelorussian population. They had, however, no time to go into the matter any further because the appointment with v. Gottberg was at 12 o'clock. No decision had been taken as to who was to head the new body. R. Ostrowski was put forward as candidate but he refused, saying that for the past two years he had been working with the military government and was not acquainted with the conditions prevailing under the civil administration. He in turn suggested Yuri Sobolevski as candidate, who had for some time been in close contact with the General Commissariat. But neither Sobolevski, nor another proposed choice, M. Shkelonak, were willing to accept. In the end the three of them went together to the conference with von Gottberg, trying on the way there to agree between themselves who should take on the candidature. But time was too short and they came to no conclusion.

At the General Commissar's office, the delegation was received by von Gottberg's personal secretary, Dr. Markus, and the chief of the political section of the SD, Sturmbannführer Sepp.

Dr. Markus first turned to Sobolevski, whom he knew well, enquiring what the reaction of the Byelorussian nationalist leaders was to General v. Gottberg's plan. Sobolevski replied that they had decided to accept the proposal and had voted for R. Ostrowski to head the new organisation (to be known eventually as the Byelorussian Central Council), but that R. Ostrowski had declined for reasons which both he, Sobolevski, and M. Shkelonak did not consider valid. Sepp then asked Ostrowski what his reasons were and the latter repeated what he had said earlier at the meeting and added that it was not clear to him what role the proposed body was to play. Sepp asked him to state the points about which he was doubtful and Dr. Markus would try to explain them. Ostrowski was in somewhat of a dilemma, since to tell the Gestapo men the truth clearly meant taking risks. After a moment's hesitation he told them that, as they would probably resent what he would have to say, he preferred not to raise the matter.

The Germans understood this remark and assured Ostrowski that at this time and place he could speak freely and that they would even be grateful to hear what he had to say. As Sepp put it: "Up to now everybody agreed with us, saying 'Jawohl' and 'alles ist gut'; but things have gone from bad to worse and now we have come to the point that without tanks we cannot put our noses further than 30 kilometres outside Minsk."

Encouraged by this unexpected frankness Ostrowski spoke without restraint and pointed out how the

Germans were falling into the traps of Bolshevik provocation and as a result made victims of entirely innocent people. If, for instance, some village does not want to co-operate with the Bolshevik partisans, the latter kill a German soldier from an ambush at night and plant his body in that village. The very next day the German SD burn down the village together with its inhabitants, including women and children. Or, another example, the partisans during the night dismantle a bridge on the main road and place materials from it near the house of a peasant who had refused to help them. In the morning the SD finds the incriminating material at the house of this peasant (having been informed by the Bolsheviks where it was to be found) and, without trial or investigation, that peasant and all his family are shot and the whole village is forced to look on.

Ostrowski cited many more concrete examples of this nature, giving the names of villages and persons, and finally stated that if the planned Byelorussian Council were unable to put a stop to such inhuman acts, it would in his opinion be better not to form it at all, because the Byelorussian people would have no faith in it and, even to the Germans, it could serve no useful purpose.

Ostrowski spoke for nearly an hour while Sepp listened attentively and Dr. Markus took notes in shorthand. When he had finished, the Germans came up to him, shook his hand and thanked him for his honest account. It had happened for the first time, they said, that they had heard the truth from a local man and they admitted that most of the cases quoted by Ostrowski were known to them and corresponded to the facts.

After that Dr. Markus left the room (presumably to report to General von Gottberg) and Sepp turned to Ostrowski and said: "Although this is the first time I've met you I am convinced that you are a great patriot and care for the fate of your people. I therefore think that you have no right to forsake your people in these difficult times and I promise you that we for our part will take your opinions into account." Here Sobolevski and Shkelonak joined in begging Ostrowski not to refuse the presidency of the new Byelorussian Central Council and offering to work with him. Before agreeing to their request Ostrowski made three conditions, i.e. that the Germans should

1) help to create and supply with arms a Byelorussian Home Guard (B.K.A.),
2) not send Byelorussians to the western front,
3) give facilities for the Second All-Byelorussian Congress.

At this point Dr. Markus returned and asked all those present to go to General v. Gottberg's office. There Ostrowski repeated his conditions and after a few more questions and answers von Gottberg consented to all Ostrowski's proposals and promised him every assistance.

He then handed him the statutes by which the Byelorussian Central Council (B.C.C.) was to abide, but stressed that the clause according to which the president of the council would be nominated by the General Commissar, and which had to be included in order to conform to the principles laid down by the Führer, was no more than a formality since he, Gottberg, merely appointed R. Ostrowski as the candidate chosen by the Byelorussians themselves. The same would apply to all members of the Council

who would be approved only on the recommendation of the president of the B.C.C.

(Here I should mention that my account of this episode is based on the words of Yuri Sobolevski which were later confirmed by R. Ostrowski himself.)*

## R. OSTROWSKI — PRESIDENT OF THE BYELORUSSIAN CENTRAL COUNCIL



*Official Seal of the B.C.C.*
*1944*

Only those familiar with the circumstances in which the BCC had to operate at the time can adequately judge the valuable work done by all its members and supporters and, above all, by the President himself. I shall not dwell too long on this subject because anyone can obtain the necessary information from the Council's decisions and decrees, which are given in the book by I. Kosyak "For National Independence of Byelorussia", pp. 83-118, published by the BCC in London in 1960.

I shall, however, describe three episodes in R. Ostrowski's life during that period, since they most clearly illustrate the character of this outstanding man.

R. Ostrowski wanted the BCC to have the closest possible contact with the population and to achieve this he chose as Council members representatives

*) The Truth About A.B.N., by Niko Nakashidze, Munich 1960, p. 54.

from the various localities. To travel in Byelorussia was, however, in those days, a dangerous undertaking. The forests were swarming with Bolshevik partisans who might shoot at anyone on the roads. The members of the Council at Minsk were therefore not keen on leaving the town and found excuses for staying at home. Ostrowski, who was used to hazards from his days near the front, ignored the dangers and on many occasions went about the country, to Slutsk, Semeshava, Kletsk, Nesvish, Baranovichi, Slonim and other places, where he held meetings and explained BCC policy to the local population as well as to the battalions of the BKA which he had formed. I remember one such meeting at Slutsk, which had been announced beforehand and which was attended by about a thousand people among whom were, of course, many Bolshevik agents who came from the partisan units. It was the first time since he became president of the BCC that Ostrowski spoke publicly in his home town. The German officials in Slutsk, including the District Commissar Karl, also came to the meeting.

Ostrowski's speech lasted one hour and a half and there was absolute silence in the overcrowded cinema. He gave a realistic account of the situation at that time and outlined the aims of the BCC. Then, suddenly, he addressed himself to the partisans among his audience: "I am certain there are among you quite a number of partisans. Some may have come here out of sheer curiosity but others, probably, with orders to kill me, because those who sent them seem to have no better arguments than pistols and grenades. But this does not worry me; I have been in many a tight spot in my life and have seen the inside of Tsarist and Polish prisons. In spite of all that I am continuing to fight for a free and independent Byelorussia...

"But what are you fighting for, you who are with the partisans? For Stalin? For him who promised our peasants land and took it away from them instead; who, instead of the promised freedom, gave us collective serfdom and sent those who resisted collectivisation — and they were two and a half million of our people — to starve to death by hunger and cold in the distant tundras of Siberia...? As he was pushed against the wall he played a different little tune; but remember that when danger is past Moscow will again drive you into collective farms and treat you like beasts of burden...

"I know that you would like to answer, but are afraid... You would like to tell me that life under the Germans is no better than under Stalin and sometimes, perhaps, even worse... And here you are right. But don't forget that there is a terrible war going on in which many are being killed on both sides. He would be a bad general who did not care about his soldiers. So the Germans care first and foremost for their soldiers and are interested in the fate of the people on occupied territory only in so far as it has any bearing on their military objectives.

"I feel no hate towards you, Partisans. On the contrary, I admire your courage and your self-sacrifice, because I know that your life in the forests is not to be envied — there is cold, there is hunger, and you are plagued by lice...

"It may easily be that mistakes made by the Germans in the past have driven you into the forests. But things have changed now... Don't think that because you were partisans you would in any case be shot. This is not so. I have received assurances from the General Commissar that anyone who voluntarily surrenders his arms will be able, without fear, to rejoin

his family and resume his normal work. Believe me that when I urge you to come out of the forests I am not setting a trap for you. I take full responsibility for my words and am thinking only of your own good... If you can convince me that by your actions you will bring happiness to our people and freedom to our country, then I myself will join you to fight both Stalin and the Germans. (At that moment there was dead silence in the hall. Then the Germans began to whisper with their interpreters and I was afraid something would happen. But Ostrowski went on.) But you, Partisans cannot muster any arguments to convince me, because you have yourselves learnt by now that the partisans sent over here by Stalin have robbed our villages far more than did the Germans. Therefore I, as faithful a son of Slutsk as you, once more appeal to you to come and surrender your arms to the district officer of the BKA who will guarantee your safe return home."

Loud applause greeted Ostrowski's speech and the response to his appeal was astounding: more than four thousand partisans left their hide-outs during the following two weeks and were sent back to their respective families. (I have copied the text of this speech from the stenograph of a correspondent for the Byelorussian Gazette.) No wonder that Moscow to this day cannot forget R. Ostrowski and at every possible opportunity tries to smear his name.

The second characteristic episode which I want to relate happened shortly before the Second All-Byelorussian Congress. It was the 8th or 9th of June, 1944. Ostrowski was on a tour of inspection of BKA units at Semashavo, Kletsk, Nesvish and Baranovichi and, as usual during his absence, the Vice-President of the BCC, M. Shkelonak, was in charge at Minsk. Before

leaving, Ostrowski had asked Shkelonak to arrange with the Germans the speedy distribution of the notices about the Second All-Byelorussian Congress, which was to be held on the 13th or 15th of June.

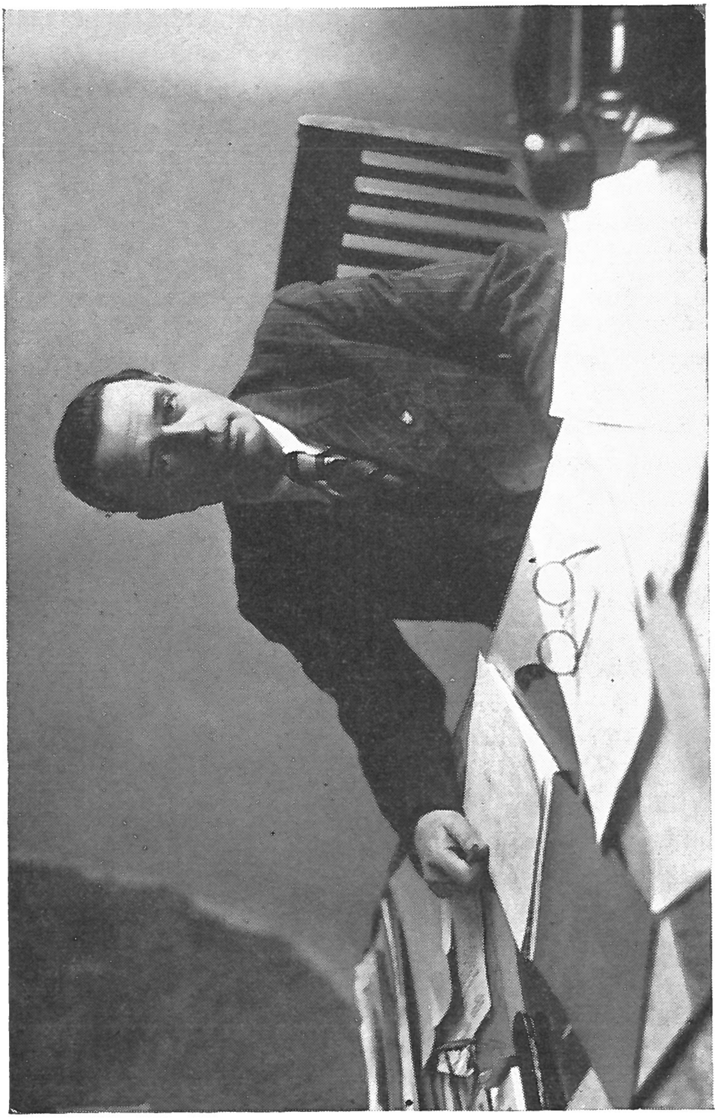
On June 8th or 9th Shkelonak went with a member of the Council, A. Kolubovich, to the chief of the German Propaganda Division, Fischer, to talk over this matter. That morning he had heard on the wireless the news of the British and American landings in Normandy and realised that this would soon mean the end for the Germans. He therefore began to wonder whether there was any sense in proceeding with the preparations for the Congress. At the meeting with Fischer the head of the political section of the SD, Sepp, was also present. During the conference Shkelonak unwisely expressed his doubts about the timeliness of the Congress, basing them on information which had already appeared in the German papers. When Sepp heard this he became very angry and said, "If you are waiting for the arrival of the Allies then we have nothing more to talk about", left the room and banged the door behind him.

When Shkelonak returned to his office at the BCC he realised that his slip could have unfortunate consequences. He telephoned to Ostrowski and asked him to return immediately to Minsk. When Ostrowski came back that same evening Shkelonak told him about the incident and did not hide his fear that all members of the BCC might face arrest. Ostrowski thought for a moment and then got on to Sepp on the telephone and reproached him for his unwillingness to help call the Congress. Sepp was evidently taken by surprise and started to defend himself. It was not he, he said, but Shkelonak who did not want to go ahead with the Congress, to which Ostrowski replied

that there had obviously been a misunderstanding since Shkelonak had bitterly complained to him about German non-cooperation. He suggested that Shkelonak, whose German was not very good, had perhaps expressed himself badly or Sepp had misconstrued what he had said. "Gott sei Dank", exclaimed Sepp, apparently relieved that it had all been a misunderstanding. So, thanks to bluff and the agility of R. Ostrowski, a potentially dangerous situation was averted. The date of the Congress had, however, to be postponed to June 27th to give time to inform BCC branches in other countries. (This incident was described to me by M. Shkelonak.)

The third episode which I want to mention refers to the time immediately after the end of the Congress* on June 27th, 1944. That evening Minsk was heavily bombed by the Bolsheviks. The front was rapidly moving westwards as the Germans retreated almost in panic. It was clear to everybody that the Germans would have to pull out of Minsk within a couple of days or so. Preparations for evacuation were therefore going on all night at the BCC offices. At 2 a.m. Sepp came to Ostrowski with a message from von Gottberg telling him to meet him at 3 a.m. in the square from whence they would depart together to the west. "And what about all the staff of the BCC?" asked Ostrowski. Sepp shrugged his shoulders, whereupon Ostrowski told him that he was not going to leave Minsk before all employees of the BCC, together with their families, had been evacuated. Sepp was evidently impressed by this and no longer insisted on keeping the appointment with von Gottberg, but told Ostrowski that he fully understood his attitude and promised that he

*) Second All-Byelorussian Congress, by R. Ostrowski, published by Byelorussian Central Council, Munich 1954.



*R. Ostrowski, Minsk, 1944.*

himself would take the matter in hand later in the morning. And, to give Sepp his due, he kept his promise. At 8 a.m. on June 28th a special train stood ready, reserved for the employees of the BCC and their families. They were instructed to board the train during the day as it was to take them away that same night. R. Ostrowski personally saw to it that nobody who wanted to leave was left behind.

On the night of 28th/29th June the train was sent on its way west, but for Ostrowski this was not the end of his troubles. A BKA battalion had arrived from Borisov and had to be given supplies before being evacuated together with the Byelorussian Officers' School. Thus another day passed before Ostrowski himself, accompanied by his adjutant, at last left the town at 3 p.m. on June 30th in the direction of Molodechno for Vilna.

The journey was not an easy one. Near Slutsk the Bolsheviks had broken through and the Radashkovichi road was blocked by the retreating German army. It took Ostrowski till the afternoon of July 1st to get to Vilna. There it was considerably quieter, but evacuation was going on at full speed. The next day, July 2nd, taking with him in his cars the members of the Committee, Ostrowski left in the direction of Kaunas and made his way via Eydtkunen, Kutno and Lodz to Berlin.

The few episodes I have described above enable us to form an opinion of the man who in the most difficult circumstances never failed to serve his people and in doing so very often risked his own life. In those days danger lurked around every corner as the methods of the German Gestapo were no different from those of the Bolshevik NKVD. I have already mentioned how Professor Markov's Jewish wife was

saved; but this was by no means the only case where R. Ostrowski took a personal risk. I remember how, when he was President of the BCC, he rescued from the clutches of the Gestapo Dr. Ladosik of Minsk, Mr. Schnek of Slutsk, and a young Soviet doctor, Kolyada, who had passed poison to the partisans and was discovered by the Byelorussian Intelligence Service which was then under M. Alferchik. Had Dr. Kolyada fallen into the hands of the SD he would undoubtedly have been shot: only Ostrowski saved him from certain death.

The Byelorussian Central Council was soon compelled to withdraw from the country before the violent assault of the Soviet armies. It went to Germany and continued the struggle for the liberation of Byelorussia from the Soviet occupation, in accordance with the decision of the Second All-Byelorussian Congress.

Part of the Byelorussian National Defence (B.K.A.) was sent to the front against the Soviet armies and some were posted to the French front.

The disorganized battalions of the so called O.D. (Ordnungs-Dienst) and Railway Security Battalions, approximately 60.000, were re-grouped as follows: some joined up with the Byelorussian National Defence (B.K.A.), the remaining were attached to the German military formations engaged in fighting the Russians.

## BERLIN

I shall not describe here the work of the Byelorussian Central Council in Berlin, since a survey of this is included in Ivan Kosyak's book "For National Independence of Byelorussia", pp. 119-184.

From this documentary account it may be seen what great difficulties the BCC had not only with the Germans but also with its own members, some of whom wanted to subordinate the BCC to General Vlasov. R. Ostrowski and representatives of other non-Russian peoples (Ukrainians, Georgians, etc.) categorically rejected this idea, which had been promoted by the top Gestapo man, Himmler. They did not, however, refuse to co-operate with the Russians on a basis of equality. Here I should stress that the BCC at that time had such standing that the leaders of other non-Russian nations looked to it in matters of policy. This was probably the reason why Himmler put the BCC most under pressure. Due credit should be given in this connection to the late Professor Dr. von Mende, who was opposed to Himmler's policy and who was a great friend to all the non-Russian peoples enslaved by the Bolsheviks.

The final convulsions of the German regime were extremely dangerous. Foreseeing their end, they tried by all possible means to postpone it. To give an example: Units of the BKA, being evacuated from the East, were intercepted and dispatched to the front in France. When Ostrowski learnt of this he strongly protested and warned the Germans that he could take no responsibility whatsoever for the results of such a step, since he was convinced that no Byelorussian would fight against the French, British or Americans, who had done no harm to his people. The Germans paid no heed to this warning, but soon found to their loss that Ostrowski had been right, for a few Byelorussian battalions who had been sent to the western

front simply eliminated their German officers and went over to the Allies.

The Germans, of course, took their revenge for these incidents on other Byelorussians and one such victim was Vital Mikula, a major in the BKA. But eventually all Byelorussian military units were withdrawn from the western front. The Germans then approached Ostrowski with the proposal to form for service in the East a special, purely Byelorussian division, in the charge of Byelorussian officers. On the German side Colonel Siegling was to coordinate with Ostrowski all the moves for the formation of this division. However it was too late and nothing came of it because the Allies rapidly occupied the whole of Germany.

Although the end of the war was very near, Ostrowski still succeeded in March 1945 in evacuating from Berlin to destinations further west all the members and staff of the BCC and their families, while he himself later had to walk 350 kilometres to join them.

To do full justice to Radoslav Ostrowski and his work it would be necessary to write a whole book and this will probably one day be done by our Byelorussian historians. I, for my part, should like to end these notes by quoting some opinions both of his supporters and his opponents.

The first of the following poems was written as early as 1935 by a young Byelorussian poet, who at the time was a pupil at the Byelorussian Grammar School in Vilna. If he has not been liquidated by the regimes of Stalin or Khrushchev he is living behind the Iron Curtain and I am therefore withholding his name.

## НАШАМУ ДЫРЭКТАРУ

*Нашы душы юнацкія дзякуюць Вам*
*За працу, што Вы палажылі;*
*Асьвяцілі дарогу навукаю нам,*
*Хмары чорныя ў сэрцах згасілі.*

*Бо Вы труд так цяжкі на сябе ўзялі,*
*Што ня кожны яго паканае;*
*Моладзь Вы на прасторы сусьвету ўзьвялі*
*Агняцвет ясных зор ёй лунае.*

*У сарцох маладых запалілі пламень,*
*Ў рукі сілу далі да змаганьня,*
*І гарыць у грудзёх лепшай долі прамень,*
*Кліч ірвецца да лепшага званьня.*

*Вы стараецесь цэлаю сілай сваей*
*Каб палепшыці долю народу,*
*Беларусі свабоду вярнуць дарагой,*
*Назаўсёды запэўніць пагоду.*

*Не глядзелі на столькі няшчасьцяў і мук,*
*Што Вас цесна кругом спавівалі;*
*Ня спусьцілі бязрадна ў бядзе сваіх рук —*
*Нестамлённа далей працавалі.*

*Дык мы дзякуем шчыра за працу для нас,*
*І на памяць альбом Вам прыносім.*
*Гэта сымбаль любові для краю і Вас,*
*Што ў сэрцах юнацкіх мы носім.*

***Вільня 1935 г.***

***Published in "Abyednanye" No. 3 (52), 1954.***

*Dedicatory poem written by a pupil of R. Ostrowski at Vilna Grammar School on the occasion of the presentation of a souvenir album in 1935.*

## TO OUR HEADMASTER

Our youthful souls express to you their thanks
For all the work that you have done for us;
By teaching you have lit for us the way
And driven off the black clouds from our hearts.

By bearing on your back a heavy load
The like few other men would undertake,
You opened up to us the universe;
Our youthful dreams became a blaze of stars.

You kindled in the youthful hearts a flame
And gave their hands the strength to wage the fight;
A living hope burns ever in their breasts
And on their lips the call to battle sounds.

With all your might and main you ever strive
A better life for all our folk to bring,
That dearest Byelorussia may be freed
And happiness may reign for evermore.

You did not heed the evil chance and pains
That threatened and assailed from every side;
Disaster found you not with folded arms,
But fighting ever harder without rest.

With all our hearts we thank you for your toil,
And in remembrance offer you this book
In token of the love that fills our hearts
For our beloved fatherland and you.

*А. САЛАВЕЙ*

## РАДАСЛАВУ АСТРОЎСКАМУ

*У час пахмарнай непагоды,*
*У шэры, немарачны час,*
*На кліч крывіцкага народу*
*Ішоў Ты з намі, вёў Ты нас.*
*Каб скінуць з плеч ярмо пакуты,*
*Каб край ня быў навалай скуты,*
*Павёў нас, вояў, за сабой.*
*Праз перашкоды, нэндзы й гора,*
*Праз цемры змрочных касарогаў*
*Змагарна мы ішлі у бой.*

*Мы ня спыняем цьвёрдых крокаў,*
*Мы ня схіляем голаў ніц,*
*Сабе цярэбім шлях шырокі*
*Праз хмары дыму, праз вагні.*
*Той перавагу й сілу мае,*
*Хто веры ў прышласьць ня губляе —*
*Яе народзіць новы бой.*
*Таму вянкі нязгаснай славы,*
*Хто нас праз гром віхурнай лавы*
*Вядзе змагарна за сабой.*

1954.

* * *

*A. SOLOVEY*

## TO RADOSLAV OSTROWSKI

In times of cloud and stormy weather,
In overcast and gloomy days,
You heard the call of the Krivichan people,
You marched with us, you led us on.
To lift the yoke from off our shoulders,
To free our land from chains of force,
For this we fought, we were behind you.
Through misery and great distress,
In darkness and o'er perilous paths,
We marched determined to the fight.

Nothing shall slow our steps advancing,
Nothing shall make us bow our heads;
Through clouds of smoke and fiery furnace
We'll force a wide and open path.
Triumph and power will be with those
Who do not lose the future's hope —
A faith that is reborn in battle.
Let us now crown with endless glory
Him who will lead, through gloom and tempest
To victory his faithful train!

*Лявон СЛУЧЧАНІН*

## НАШАМУ ПРЭЗІДЭНТУ

*(на дзень ягонага нараджэньня)*

*Калі над Нёмнам, над Сожам, над Дняпром*
*Сьцякалі хмары чорныя крывёю,*
*Калі прасторамі валодаў толькі гром*
*І сьмерць упрысядкі скакала над зямлёю,*

*Тады, скрось немарач заклятых сьлёзных год,*
*Якія трупамі свой чорны сьлед усьлалі,*
*Ты к нам прыйшоў, каб зноў вясьці народ*
*Дарогай збройнаю у сонечныя далі.*

*Мы працай плённаю спаткалі Твой прыход,*
*Твае рашучыя і дзейныя пачыны,*
*Дарогай збройнаю на бой пайшоў народ,*
*Жыцьцё ратуючы прыгнечанай айчыны.*

*І хоць прасторамі далей пануе гром,*
*Хоць упіваецца людзкой крывёю нелюдзь,*
*Аднак, над Нёманам, над Сожам, над Дняпром*
*Змаганьня плённага усходы зелянеюць.*

*Таму я рад, што Ты у час такі*
*Пылаеш вогнішчам сьвятога Яна Гуса.*
*Хвала любому з нас, хто зможа скрозь вякі*
*Пранесьці горда імя Беларуса.*

* * *

***Published in "Abyednanye" No. 5 (58), 1955.***

*Leon SLUCHANIN*

## TO OUR PRESIDENT

*(on his birthday)*

When our rivers Neman, Sozh and Dniepr
Flowed black with blood,
When all the universe was rolling thunder
and death strode o'er the earth,

Then — through the gloom of spellbound tearful years,
Their passage marked by corpses —
You came to us to lead our troubled people
With arms to reach brighter distant horizons.

It was your coming spurred us into action,
Following your example,
The people went to battle to defend
The oppressed fatherland.

Though space is still with thunder filled, and beasts
Still drunk with human blood —
On verdant banks of Neman, Sozh and Dniepr
Fruits of our struggle start to show.

So I rejoice that at this time you bear
The torch, as did Jan Hus.
Praise be to him who honours through all time
The name of Byelorussia.

And now let us take a look at what the enemies of R. Ostrowski have to say. The story "Zmaharniya Darohi" (Highways of Struggle) by Akula (Kachan) was evidently written at first without any references to the BCC or Ostrowski, but when it came under "censorship" the author added some nonsensical and contradictory passages mostly of a libellous nature. But, whether by an oversight or to demonstrate his objectivity, the author writes on p. 36 as follows:

> "...even his political opponents openly admit to this day that Ostrowski, as President of the BCC, during the Nazi occupation of Byelorussia, was equal to his task. And by task is meant the exploitation of his position as President of the BCC for the defence of the Byelorussian people and of their interests..."

## AFTER WORLD WAR II

In the chaos of the post-war period and with the division of Western Germany into three occupation zones, British, American and French, it was difficult to call a meeting of the BCC, since its members were dispersed in different zones which made it hard to get in touch with them and because the majority of them were afraid that they might be called to account by the Allies for collaboration with the Germans during the war. With considerable effort Ostrowski managed to get some of the members together and at their meeting it was decided to suspend the activities of the BCC for the time being and to create some other organisation which was to represent the Byelorussians in emigration. A Byelorussian National Committee was formed at Regensburg, and other representative bodies

were created locally in almost every Displaced Persons camp at which Byelorussians lived in any significant numbers.

In this period fell the announcement by Mikola Abramchik that he considered himself the "testamentary" President of the Byelorussian National Republic. He started to form his council, which was joined by some former members of the BCC, among them F. Kushal, Simon Kandibovich and Eugene Kalubovich. The first activity of this council was to shower abuse on R. Ostrowski. Outraged by the behaviour of these "Old Krivichans" the supporters of the BCC demanded that Ostrowski should revive the BCC and its functions. Ostrowski did not feel there was any need for hurry, but eventually he had to call a plenary session of the BCC, which took place at Ellwangen. The members elected the executive of the BCC and a standing committee, who gathered round the BCC a considerable part of the Byelorussian emigrants.

The Byelorussians in exile were thus split into two camps hostile to each other. Their differences were further aggravated when Abramchik accepted the principle of so-called "non-determination", which had been put forward by the Russian group of the "American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism." The split exists to the present day, but the antagonism has taken more quiet forms, since libellous ammunition on both sides was soon exhausted. This period would need a good deal more explanation, but that is more than I have aimed to do. I therefore limit myself to quoting a short but appropriate poem, which refers to that period, by the well known Byelorussian poet, U. Klishevich, and dedicated to R. Ostrowski in September, 1955.

*Ул. КЛІШЭВІЧ*

## РАДАСЛАВУ АСТРОЎСКАМУ

*Коньнік адважны былі Вы,*
*За Вамі скакалі героі,*
*Каб вызваліць родныя нівы,*
*Каб з ворагам сілы памерыць.*

*Былі там і людзі — героі,*
*Была там й нячыстая чэлядзь,*
*Што толькі аб цёпласьці мроіць,*
*Што мяккімі словамі сьцеліць . . .*

*Ды конь Ваш спаткнуўся часова*
*Запахла другім на папасе*
*І чэлядзь лісьцівых словаў*
*Геройскі на Вас узьнялася.*

*І тыя, што ўчора дугою*
*Кідаліся ў ногі лісьціва,*
*Дарогаю топчуць другою,*
*Чакаючы цёплых прыліваў . . .*

*Красуй, Беларусь, без атчаю,*
*Бо сонца ніхто не патушыць,*
*А людзі . . . а людзі бываюць*
*Прадажныя юдавы душы.*

*Лос Анджэлэс, Верасень 1955 г.*

* * *

*U. KLISHEVICH*

## TO RADOSLAV OSTROWSKI

You were a rider brave and bold,
Behind you heroes rode.
You went to free your native land
And pit your strength against the foe.

The people had their heroes too,
But also scum whose only thought
Their own content, who with soft words
Smoothed for themselves their selfish way...

Then your mount stumbled for a while,
Tempted by scent of pastures green,
And at this sign the flattering scum
With cowards' courage turned against you.

Those yesterday who bowed to you
And meekly grovelled at your feet
Today are treading different paths
Waiting for the tide to turn...

Grow stronger, Byelorussia, nor despair,
No-one will e'er blot out the sun!
And as for men, there always will be some
Willing to sell their Judas souls.

1955.

APPENDIX 1.

## THE SECOND ALL-BYELORUSSIAN CONGRESS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Twenty years have gone since the time when on June 27, 1944, the Second All-Byelorussian Congress met in Minsk, the capital of Byelorussia, and unanimously passed the following basic resolution: (1) To acknowledge as right and to reaffirm the historic resolution of the Council of the Byelorussian National Republic, which had the authorization from the First All-Byelorussian Congress of 1917 and which on its assembly on March 25th, 1918, with the solemn Third Constitutional Act determined finally to break Byelorussia away from Communist Russia and the Russian state in any form; (2) to declare that the Byelorussian people have never accepted, do not accept now, and never will accept as a form of their own Byelorussian state the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic forced upon them by the Moscow imperialists; (3) to inform all governments and nations of the entire world that the voice of Moscow and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in Byelorussian affairs does not have any legal validity and all so-called Byelorussian governments, created by Moscow, do not have any legal competence, because they are not acknowledged by the Byelorussian people. Therefore, all agreements or political decisions of the governments of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, of former Poland, and of the present so-called government of Poland in exile, concerning the territory of Byelorussia and the Byelorussian people, which have been

made or which will be made in the future, the Second All-Byelorussian Congress hereby proclaims as devoid of legal force, as well as various other possible attempts by other states and nations to partition Byelorussia; and (4) the Byelorussian Central Council (Rada), with its President Radoslav Ostrowski at its head, is acknowledged this day as the only legal representative of the Byelorussian people and their country.

These four brief points resolve almost all the questions put before the Second All-Byelorussian Congress for its authority.

First of all, the will of the Byelorussian people to lead a sovereign life was stressed once again. Secondly, the Congress reaffirmed the memorable Act of 25th March 1918, which ever since has served as the basis for an independent Byelorussia.

It should be appreciated that this ratification of the Act was necessary, because it was passed only by the Executive Committee of the Congress (supported by various political organisations) which called itself Rada (Council) of the Byelorussian Republic, and not by the legislative assembly.

Above all, the reaffirmation of the Act of 25th March 1918 was made necessary by the fact that the representatives of the Rada of the Byelorussian Democratic Republic, at the Berlin Conference of 20th October 1925, had entered into an agreement with the Bolsheviks, had surrendered their mandates and recognized the so-called Byelorussian S.S.R. created by the Bolsheviks. This is why the Second All-Byelorussian Congress, in its 2nd point, had to underline the fact "that the Byelorussian people have never accepted, do not accept now, and never will accept as a form of their own Byelorussian state the Byelo-

russian S.S.R. forced upon them by the Moscow imperialists." The Congress had to annul also all international treaties for the division and annexation of Byelorussian territory that were made by our enemies between the years 1918 and 1944.

Furthermore it was necessary to establish a legal representation for Byelorussia because the previous one — in the shape of the Rada of the Democratic Republic — dissolved as stated above, partly because some members resigned, others were liquidated by the Bolsheviks, and the rest died a natural death. Therefore it was quite proper and inevitable for the future that the Byelorussian Central Council was appointed as the only legal representative of Byelorussia with full mandatory powers.

The late Nicholas Shila, a participant of the First and the Second All-Byelorussian Congress, and also a member of the Rada of the Byelorussian Democratic Republic, in the pamphlet entitled "And what will be later", published in Braunschweig in 1948, said the following: "To take one's stand on a non-existent Rada (BNR) or a so-called testamentary government BNR and to reject the Second All-Byelorussian Congress and the Byelorussian Central Council, recognised by this Congress, would be the action only of reckless opportunists or conscious destroyers of the Byelorussian Independence Movement." We should not forget, said N. Shila, "that at every possible opportunity the Byelorussian people revealed, in every possible form, their desire for freedom. With all historical objectivity it must be admitted that in 1917-1918 the will of the Byelorussian people could and did reveal itself in the decisions of the First All-Byelorussian Congress; during 1941-1944 the will of the people was made clear through the decisions of the Second All-

Byelorussian Congress. No political expedience, no irresponsibility or any other subjective motive can serve as argument for the falsification of Byelorussian history."

There is no need to establish the ideological continuity between the First and the Second All-Byelorussian Congresses—it is obvious. The ideological torch was lighted on the 25th of March 1918, was carried faithfully through generations to the Second All-Byelorussian Congress and raised high by the Byelorussian people. It is still burning and its flame will never be extinguished. With confidence our aim is to carry it until the Third All-Byelorussian Congress that should assemble in our fatherland, a sovereign and independent Byelorussia.

Appraising the great event of the Second All- Byelorussian Congress it is impossible not to pay homage to its main initiator and organizer, Prof. Radoslav Ostrowski.

On the 19th December 1943, the most active Byelorussian politicians proposed to Prof. Ostrowski to assume the post of President of the Byelorussian Central Council. The situation at that time was not encouraging since the German armies were retreating on all fronts, and the prospects were far from bright.

As we know, Prof. Ostrowski, fulfilling his duty to the Byelorussian people and his fatherland, and despite the critical circumstances of that time, accepted the presidency of the Byelorussian Central Council, but only on the following conditions:

1) That the Byelorussian Central Council was to have the possibility to organize the Byelorussian Army (Byelorussian National Defence).

2) That the Byelorussian National Defence would fight only against the Bolsheviks and only on Byelorussian territory.

3) That Prof. Radoslav Ostrowski would assume the post of President of the Council only temporarily, until the meeting of the Assembly of the Second All-Byelorussian Congress.

This stand taken by Prof. Ostrowski gave the Germans to understand that he regarded them merely as occupiers and that they had no right to decide the question of the Presidency of the Byelorussian Central Council, intended to be the highest State authority, which is the sole prerogative of the Byelorussian people, its delegates and the All-Byelorussian Congress.

The firm and categorical attitude of Prof. Ostrowski won and the Germans were forced to lend their help to the Byelorussian Central Council in calling the Second All-Byelorussian Congress.

Prof. Ostrowski, at the end of the speech which he delivered to the Congress, said: "It is up to you, Delegates, to judge if the work carried out by the Byelorussian Central Council was correct and adequate. I only would like to state that the Byelorussian Central Council fulfilled its duty to the people honestly, according to the possibilities it had, which were, however, largely limited by external conditions. Now, at this moment, I, as President, and the Byelorussian Central Council itself transfer our plenary powers to the Congress. From this moment the fate of our fatherland is in your hands..."

In response to the speech of Prof. Ostrowski, the Congress, by a unanimous vote, elected him President of the Byelorussian Central Council.

It is not surprising that Prof. Ostrowski was nominated for this high and important post. All Byelorussia knew him as a pioneer of the Byelorussian National Movement, an indefatigable veteran of the Byelorussian liberation struggle, and a faithful Democrat of his country.

**A. W.**

APPENDIX 2.

## Extracts from the speech by Radoslav Ostrowski to the Second All-Byelorussian Congress at Minsk, 27 June 1944.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Delegates to the Second All-Byelorussian Congress!

One of the most important events in the past history of Byelorussia was the First All-Byelorussian Congress of 1917, which began its work in this famed building and at which the country's best sons, representatives of all Byelorussia, formulated and proclaimed to the world at large the ideas and aims they stood for.

Although the Bolsheviks dissolved that Congress by armed force, its work was carried on by its Council and Secretariat and by each individual delegate who, after returning home, spread with increasing vigour the idea of the liberation movement among the mass of the Byelorussian people, an idea which has survived 25 years of enslavement until this day.

The will of the people was conclusively expressed in the proclamation of 25 March 1918, a national testament for all future generations. In order to carry this will into effect there are fighting today not single individuals, not groups or separate parties, but the entire Byelorussian nation.

As a participant at the first All-Byelorussian Congress I am very happy today that on me fell the honour to call and open this Second All-Byelorussian Congress, which brings to life the spirit of an earlier generation and registers before the whole world our protest against the unlawful decisions made by the enemies of our country in shameless violation of the will of the Byelorussian people.

The right to live, bestowed on all men by God, ought not to be denied to anyone, never to be taken away by brutal force. It is most regrettable that people endowed with a free will should ever disregard this basic right. All through the history of mankind there have been instances of the physical destruction of a people, yet no force whatever has so far succeeded in destroying the human spirit. The spirit of man, and even more so that of a nation, is immortal and invincible when it strives for an ideal. Falsehood and brute force may dominate for a time, commit violence and injustice, oppress the weak and injure the innocent, but sooner or later truth will prevail and justice will be done.

History gives us the best proof of this and shows how those who committed injustice and violated the rights of weaker nations very soon got what they deserved.

A more disgraceful and brutal act than the Treaty of Riga, as it affected the Byelorussian people, can hardly be found in the civilised world. By it the live body of Byelorussia was literally dismembered. For a whole quarter of a century cruel frontiers cut across the nation, which grew ever weaker and almost bled to death. Other, no less serious wounds, were inflicted on the tortured body. The liquidation of the Byelorussian Peasants' and Workers' Hramada in the west and the bloody end of the National Democrats in the east completely deprived our nation of every strength. It was gradually passing away... It seemed that all was lost and no hope left. It looked as if injustice had won and would rule triumphant...

But suddenly everything changed beyond recognition. He who directs life and the whole of His creation put an end to the sadistic torture under which our

country suffered and meted out His punishment to the guilty. In a matter of days the Poles and the Bolsheviks, who had so ill-treated our nation and seemed invincible, were scattered, their grip on us released.

The country gradually revived, became a little stronger, its wounds began to heal... until at last it stood on its feet again.

There was, of course, no chance of a rapid recovery after a grave illness which had lasted 24 years. It took two years for the country to stand up straight and be able to work again. The process of rehabilitation was prolonged and made difficult by unfavourable circumstances. All around were the flames of war, the rattling of machine guns, the thunder of cannons. But strength returned slowly and gradually and the nation recovered, not so much in the body as in spirit. It began to rebuild the life of the ravaged country. Considerable achievements were made in all spheres of the economic and cultural life. As time went on people became ever more active, not only in the process of reconstruction but they began to take up arms in the defence of Byelorussia. Every day more and more of our people joined in the fight against Stalin's bandits and partisans who were sent to our country and were stupified with communist propaganda. The growing extent of this struggle finally called for more concerted action and for the concentration of all the dispersed forces willing to fight for their fatherland.

To achieve this, a central directing body was required that would determine policy and coordinate action, and from this need sprang the Byelorussian Central Council.

The urgency of finding a solution to various problems of importance to the future of Europe and of introducing certain ideas into the minds of the people did not allow us to be guided by the old liberal principles, as these would have led to extensive and lengthy discussions. Instead we had to take immediate action and rely on the best cadres among our people who were ready to take upon their shoulders the responsibility towards future generations.

The active elements from every region of the Byelorussian nation have therefore been called together and these representatives have proposed me as president of the BCC. According to the statutes of the Council, it has fallen to me to appoint the members of the Council. And here we come to the question on what principle we are to base the system of national representation. Is it to be one-man leadership or liberal democracy?

Both have their advantages and disadvantages. The democratic system, based on the universal direct and secret vote, has not always come up to expectation. This is why among some nations, after many trials and errors, the idea of a diametrically opposed system was born, namely that of one-man leadership. The principles involved in this form of government should, of course, not be synonymous with irresponsible dictatorship. It should, however, limit the influence on affairs of state of uninformed elements and give full scope to those who have the nation's interests in mind and most energetically work for them.

In times of peace, the shortcomings of democratic government are not particularly dangerous, but in times of war no nation can afford to make experiments.

Even in the most democratic countries, one individual comes to the top in times of emergency

who holds in his hands the rudder of government. And there is no other choice. If the ship of state is to sail safely it must be under the command of one experienced captain. This principle has always been understood and accepted in the military field, and in time of war it should be applied to other sectors of the state as well. At a time when the fate of a nation is at stake, when the question before every one of us is "to be or not to be", everything must be subordinated to the needs of war and all of us must work with equal efficiency for the final victory. This axiom is certainly understood by those who usually shout loudest about the need of adhering to democratic principles, i.e. the Bolsheviks.

Are not their "democratic" elections and plebiscites a constant forgery? Are not the so-called "Republics" of the Soviet Union fiction also? Even in the Communist party itself Bolshevik "representation" and "elections" are an insult to the concept of democracy. The Bolsheviks themselves know all this, but we, too, know something about it.

The members of the BCC are not self-appointed impostors who have no connection whatever with the Byelorussian liberation movement, as the Bolsheviks are trying to describe them to the masses. And in order to explode that sort of propaganda lie I have considered it my duty to call you, Delegates, together here to put before you the magnitude of the problems and the responsibility which face us, and to provide an opportunity for closer active co-operation in the tasks before us.

The BCC was created at a time when almost the whole of Byelorussian territory was infested with bandits of various kinds who went about killing and robbing our people, burning our villages and farm-

steads, and thus completely paralysed the economic and social life of the country. The problems before us were extremely difficult and, if I had not been driven by a sense of duty to serve our people and our country at a most critical time, I should not have taken upon myself the role in which I stand before you today.

To what extent we have been able to discharge our duty towards the nation will in the future be for you and later for history to judge.

In accordance with the statutes of the BCC, our first task was to do something about the defence of the country against Bolshevik and other armed bands. We fully realised that no cultural or social work on any worthwhile scale was possible before a relatively quiet life for the population was secured. We therefore had to consider in the first place how to organise our own armed force. The setting up of large units or of defence-villages on a voluntary basis was no answer to the problem because the families of the volunteers would have been the first victims of the bandits. It was necessary, therefore, to enlist the whole population for the fight against the enemy, and to this end I gave the orders on 10th March this year for the call-up of certain age groups into the BKA.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to tell you that, in spite of the many difficulties with which we met in our mobilisation campaign, we achieved even better results than we had expected. Nearly 100% of those who had been called up punctually reported to the recruiting offices. Numerous BKA battalions were formed covering the territories of Minsk, Borisov, Slutsk, Baranovichi, Slonim, Novogrodok, Vileyka and Glibokaye. In other localities conscription into the BKA has been deferred for technical reasons.

The success of our mobilisation has proved the

national maturity of our people and their resolve to do their duty for the good of the fatherland.

Although the initial difficulties connected with the mobilization were eventually overcome, thanks to the energy and self-sacrifice of local authorities and my regional deputies, new and more intricate problems arose afterwards.

Tens of thousands of BKA soldiers had to be supplied with food, arms, clothing and footwear. Since we had at our disposition neither a well-trained staff nor an organised supply, the difficulties were often insurmountable. At the present moment our battalions are nevertheless armed, fed and at least partly clothed and shod. But great efforts by our nation are still necessary in order to provide our soldiers with everything they need.

If the result of our mobilisation was proof of the national maturity of the Byelorussian people, the picture of our soldier — often ill-clad and barefoot, knee-deep in mud, exposed to the cold, but firmly holding his rifle — is proof of his unusual strength and of his undying devotion to his fatherland and people.

Having inspected the BKA battalions and seen in what conditions they are fighting unshakably for the freedom of our country, I declare that our Byelorussian riflemen are equal to the best soldiers in the world.

In spite of all the shortcomings and the difficult circumstances our BKA battalions had to face, they have already done much to deserve the gratitude of the country. Some of them are bravely fighting as separate units and risking their lives for the fatherland on the internal front in actions against large numbers of Stalinist bandits who are supported by

the regular Red Army. Others are engaged in supporting services in the districts and small towns. That many villages were able to do their spring sowing is entirely due to the protection afforded by the BKA.

Of course, we cannot yet regard our task of organising the necessary number of battalions as completed. But first we must put into shape the forces we have now before we can extend mobilisation to other districts. Our greatest problem is the lack of trained officers and NCOs.

Although the Byelorussian is a very good soldier, the fact remains that much preparation and a lot of training is required for positions of command. Two courses for the training of officers and NCOs have already been running for some time, and on the 15th of June the Officers' School at Minsk was established which takes in young people from secondary and other schools. Parallel to this, several training battalions will soon be organised in certain districts which should turn out fully trained NCOs.

APPENDIX 3.

**(Extract from "The Truth About A.B.N.) (Anti-bolshevik Bloc of Nations)" by Niko Nakashidze, Munich 1960, p. 54)**

The Byelorussian Central Council (Rada) was not a German invention, but a direct product of the struggle of the Byelorussian people for the liberation of their country from occupants and mainly from the Russians and the Poles.

This struggle according to circumstances assumed various forms. At the head of his movement in 1918 was the Council of the Byelorussian Democratic Republic, which proclaimed Byelorussia as an independent state. One of the most active members of this Council and Minister of Education in the second Byelorussian Government was Professor R. Ostrowski, who has been the President of the Byelorussian Central Council from December 21st, 1943, but not from 1941, onwards.

To settle the question of the national representation of Byelorussia, the Byelorussian Central Council on June 27, 1944, convened the Second All-Byelorussian Congress in Minsk. 1,039 delegates from all parts of the country, representing all classes of the people, took part in this congress. With patriotic fervour, the congress reaffirmed the act proclaiming the state independence of the Byelorussian Democratic Republic on March 25, 1918, annulled all international treaties for the division and annexation of Byelorussia, and re-established a national representation of Byelorussia and the Byelorussian people in the form of the Byelorussian Central Council (Rada).

And it was unanimously resolved that the Byelorussian Central Rada, with its President Radoslav

Ostrowski at its head, was the only legal representative of the Byelorussian people and their country.

If the above-mentioned activity dictated by Byelorussian reasons of state is regarded as criminal collaboration, the question must be raised, — was not the "Peace" of Munich on October 1, 1938, criminal collaboration? Secondly, was not the Soviet-German plot of 1939 against Poland criminal collaboration? And, thirdly, was not co-opration with the same Soviet Union, which is guilty of Katyn, Vinnytsia and countless other atrocities, also criminal collaboration?

APPENDIX 4.

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4. HANDBOOK OF COSMOGRAPHY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS. Vilna. 1924.

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6. Ribkin: GEOMETRICAL PROBLEMS.
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8. FRAGMENTS FROM THE HISTORY OF BYELORUSSIA UP TO THE XVIIIth CENTURY. Published by B.C.C. London, 1961.

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